The Development of the Lewis House in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, with Particular Emphasis on the Bragar Township

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Do mo sheanair, Wiktor Giedroyć, nach maireann,
a bha 'na dhotair romham,
is e 'gam chur riamh roimhe.
'Na chuimhne, le gaol.

~~~

In memory of my grandfather, Wiktor Giedroyć,
who was a doctor before me,
and who always put me before him.
With love.
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work herein is my own and has not been submitted in candidature for any other degree, postgraduate diploma or professional qualification.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to investigate the extent to which social and cultural change affected housing change in the Isle of Lewis throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing particularly on the Bragar township on the West Side of Lewis.

The thesis examines the theory that houses are social constructs, and are therefore influenced more by the culture and society in which they are built, than by the surrounding environment. The thesis also looks at the causes and the process of change in material culture, and identifies four areas in which change manifests in vernacular housing: the Fabric of the house (the walls, the roof, and the floor), the Features of the house (the hearth, the windows, and the doors), the Furnishings of the house (including furniture and decoration), and the Function of the house (comprising housing layout and use of space). It also discusses continuity, and examines the difference between historical continuity (or the simple perpetuation of tradition), and conscious continuity (i.e. continuity as a conscious decision not to change).

Forty-one houses in the Bragar township were examined and measured to produce plans at a scale of 1:250. Using map evidence, five time periods, or phases, were identified, from Phase 1 (the pre-lotting houses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) to Phase 5 (houses that were built post-1895). By examining the plans chronologically this thesis identifies changes in size and layout over the period in which these houses were built. Other changes discussed in the thesis include the introduction of partitions, the movement of the hearth from the centre of the room to a partition or a gable wall, and the introduction of windows, timber furniture, and decoration.

The thesis then examines, chronologically, developments in the Lewis house, and the corresponding developments in society and culture, throughout the period in question, examining any correlations between housing change and socio-cultural change. It also looks at the process of, and the motivations for, housing change and continuity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showing that different motivations and processes were in play, both for the tenants and for the authorities, at different times over the two hundred year period.

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Abbreviations

BoA	Board of Agriculture
CEATS	Comann Eachdraidh an Taobh Siar (West Side Historical Society)
CEN	Comunn Eachdraidh Nis (Ness Historical Society)
CNES	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council)
COED	*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*
DoA	Department of Agriculture
DSL	*Dictionary of the Scots Language*
EVAW	*Encyclopaedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HRB	Highland Relief Board
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NSA	*New Statistical Account*
OS	Ordnance Survey
OSA	*Old Statistical Account*
PSAS	*Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*
RCAHMCS	Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland (latterly the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland)
RCAHMS	Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (formerly the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland)
RNR	Royal Naval Reserve
ROSC	*Review of Scottish Culture*
SC	Saoghal a' Chroiteir (The Crofter's World)
SVBWG	Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group
WRNS	Women's Royal Naval Service

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the development of rural, vernacular housing in Lewis during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with particular emphasis on the township of Bragar, on the West Side of Lewis. The aim of the thesis is to examine to what extent social and cultural change (as opposed to changes in the physical environment) influenced and brought about the development of housing in this area. This thesis brings together the available physical, oral, and written sources to create as complete a picture as possible of housing change in Lewis during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, settlements in Lewis were situated around the coast. The land was farmed in runrig, whereby small clusters of dwellings shared portions of the arable land which was re-divided among them every few years. However, the settlements in Lewis moved twice during the course of the nineteenth century as the land was lotted and re-lotted. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the island was first lotted by the proprietor, Francis Humberston MacKenzie, with a view to restructuring the agricultural system and abolishing runrig. In the mid-nineteenth century, the island was re-lotted by the then proprietor James Matheson. These two lottings resulted in new houses being built by the tenants, on the plots of land allotted to them. In Bragar, there was also a third settlement shift, towards the end of the nineteenth century, which resulted in new houses being built. The reasons for this third shift are unclear and will be discussed in full in Chapter 6.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the vernacular houses in Lewis were constructed of double-skinned dry-stone walls, with the inner space filled with earth and clay. The roofs were of timber, turf, and thatch, and floors were of clay. The hearth was in the centre of the floor and there was little by way of furniture. There were no windows and no chimney, and the soot-filled thatch was removed annually and used as fertilizer on the crops. These houses consisted of a byre-dwelling unit with attached barn and *fosglan* (porch). The cattle were housed in one end of the

byre-dwelling, and the people in the other end, with no partition between them. There was only one door, in the byre-end of the house, which was used by both people and cattle. These houses are generally referred to as 'blackhouses', a term which dates from no later than the early nineteenth century. The possible origins of this term, and its use throughout the thesis, will be discussed in Chapter 2. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, this type of housing began to change and this thesis seeks first to identify and then examine the changes that occurred by studying them in their socio-cultural contexts.

Chapter 1 details the approach adopted in this thesis and explains the importance of studying the houses within their current social and cultural contexts. It is generally accepted today that culture and society, rather than environment, are the strongest influential factors in the design of vernacular, and non-vernacular, architecture. The great variety of built forms to be found in ecologically similar regions all over the world is sufficient to suggest that climate, geography and materials, while perhaps dictating the outside limits of architectural design, do not determine the end results.[1] In his seminal work, *House Form and Culture*, Rapoport (1969a: 47) suggests that 'house form [...] is the consequence of a whole range of socio-cultural factors seen in their broadest terms.' In his opinion it is these 'socio-cultural factors' that are the primary determinants of house form, and other factors, such as environment, are 'secondary' or 'modifying'. It has also been suggested, by a number of prominent sociologists, anthropologists, architects, and archaeologists, that the built environment is not only a product of, but also a co-creator of, the socio-cultural environment, which may be usefully termed *genre de vie* (way of life). In this context, *genre de vie* encompasses not just the livelihoods of the people, but their complete social and cultural worlds. If *genre de vie* is reflected in the built environment, and vice versa, it can be assumed that changes in one will bring about changes in the other. The study of *genre de vie* is therefore an important resource in the study of architectural change, and it might also be argued that an in-depth study of *genre de vie* (i.e. the social and cultural history of a people) cannot be complete

[1] A good example of this is can be found by looking at the houses of the Eskimo. Although all Eskimo live in a climate that has much snow, not all Eskimo build houses of snow. Others build houses of driftwood and sod, albeit in a similar domed shape (Spier 1960: 231).

without a study of the architecture of the people, which is central to the structuring of their communities and relationships. The approach taken to this study of housing change is therefore one which recognises the importance of examining the houses within their social and cultural contexts and seeks to examine the extent to which the changing *genre de vie* is reflected in housing change throughout rural Lewis.

Chapter 2 introduces the geographical area of study and the methodology involved. The Island of Lewis was chosen for this study principally due to the nature of the surviving physical evidence. Many of the vernacular houses in Lewis were lived in until the 1950s and the remains of houses dating from the late eighteenth century can still be seen on the island. Many of the people who were brought up in these houses still live in Lewis and constitute a rich source of information on the development of island housing during the twentieth century. In order to conduct a more in-depth study, it was decided that the fieldwork should focus upon the physical and oral evidence to be found in one township. The township of Bragar, on the West Side, was chosen due to the nature of the surviving physical evidence, and to the wealth of information held by local informants.

Of the physical data, forty-one houses, ranging from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, were measured and plans drawn up. These were used to interpret general changes in size and layout during this time. Local people were interviewed about the houses they had lived in or remembered from their youth (a number of which were included in the physical data collected), and also about earlier houses and about the changing *genre de vie* of nineteenth and twentieth century Lewis. A wealth of information about both housing and lifestyle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was also found in a variety of published and unpublished sources. In particular, evidence contained in the Seaforth Muniments held in the National Archives of Scotland proved invaluable, as did a number of Government reports, published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which examined the social conditions of the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

Chapter 3 examines the nature of change in material culture and looks at the history of vernacular architecture in Lewis and in northern Scotland. The nature of change in material culture, and its relevance to vernacular housing, is discussed in order to create a framework in which housing change in Lewis may be examined and interpreted. Motivations for change are considered, as is the process of change, and two types of continuity – 'conscious continuity' and 'historical continuity' – are determined and discussed. The ways in which change can manifest in vernacular architecture are also examined. By looking at the history of vernacular architecture in Lewis, and in the Hebrides and Northern Isles more generally, it can be seen that housing has been continually changing since the Neolithic period, and also that there was diversity in building traditions over relatively short geographical distances. This remained true during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as housing developed differently throughout the Hebrides.

The next four chapters introduce the houses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before looking chronologically at the development of housing in Lewis throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and at the relationship of this to the changing *genre de vie*. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the history of housing change in Lewis is the story of two distinct groups of people – the tenants and those in authority (be they proprietors or governmental bodies) – each of whom had their own motivations and attitudes towards housing change. During the period in question, the ownership of Lewis changed hands a number of times. Lewis was owned by the MacKenzie family from 1610 to 1844, when the island was sold to James Matheson. In 1889, the responsibility for local administration was removed from the island's proprietors and given over to various local authorities. However, the island remained in the possession of the Matheson family until 1918 when it was sold to Lord Leverhulme. After Leverhulme's death in 1925, rural Lewis was sold off to various buyers. This thesis will show how the motivations of each group (tenants and those in authority) towards housing change, and the processes employed by them, changed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Chapter 4 introduces the pre-lotting houses and the settlements of the early MacKenzie period (1610 to 1783) within the socio-cultural context of the late eighteenth century. It includes a description of the physical attributes of the houses, and a discussion of the different social, cultural, and environmental factors that may have influenced the design of the houses at this time.

Chapter 5 deals with the late MacKenzie period from 1783 to 1844, during which time the first lotting took place and the first housing changes were proposed by the proprietor, Stewart MacKenzie. The first lotting is discussed in the wider context of the contemporary movement towards 'Agricultural Improvement', and both the tenants' and the proprietors' attitudes to housing and settlement change are discussed.

Chapter 6 deals with the Matheson period from 1844 to 1900, during which time the second lotting and the third settlement shift took place. Matheson was keen to encourage tenants in Lewis to improve their houses, in line with the notions of social and cultural reform that were prevalent at that time, and towards the end of this period we begin to see certain housing changes being adopted in some townships. This chapter also discusses the changes in *genre de vie* which may have contributed to the introduction of these changes, and looks, in particular, at the seasonal departure of women from Lewis to herring fishing bases throughout mainland Britain.

Chapter 7 looks at the housing changes, and at the changes in *genre de vie*, which took place during the twentieth century. First of all, it deals with the period prior to the First World War, from 1900 to 1914, before moving on to the period from the beginning of the First World War in 1914 to the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. It then discusses the influence of the Second World War and looks at the changes which occurred during the post-war years, from 1945 onwards. In particular, this chapter looks at the effects of the change of responsibility for local administration from the proprietors to the government, and at the subsequent changes in the motivation of those in authority and in their method of implementing change. This chapter also focuses on the growing desire of younger tenants for modern

housing, and discusses the influence of the Board of Agriculture in the introduction of new houses.

The Conclusion summarises the findings of each chapter, bringing together the evidence presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, and highlighting seven principal conclusions. The conclusions relate to (1) the tensions that resulted from the different perspectives of tenants and those in authority with regard to housing change, (2) the motivations for change of those in authority and the process through which they chose to implement change, (3) the tenants' acceptance of settlement change but rejection of housing change, (4) the influence of the 1886 Crofters Act on the introduction of housing change, (5) the diversity of housing change and continuity throughout the island, (6) the effects of the tenants' changing *genre de vie* on housing change, and (7) the order in which certain housing changes were adopted. This chapter also discusses the ways in which this thesis contributes to the current body of academic knowledge about rural vernacular housing in Lewis, and in Scotland as a whole, and makes suggestions for further research in this area.

Much of the physical evidence, collected and reproduced in photographs and house plans, is presented throughout the text. A full set of house plans is also included in Appendix 3.

The chosen approach to this research is thus one which views the socio-cultural history of a people as essential to an understanding of the development of their housing. The history of Lewis has been well documented by a number of authors such as Geddes (1955), Thompson (1968), and MacDonald (1990), and it is not my intention to produce, in this thesis, a complete social or cultural history of Lewis, or even of Bragar. Socio-cultural change will therefore be introduced and examined only to the extent that it is directly relevant to the thesis question, i.e. where it affects housing either directly or indirectly. The reader will be directed to other publications, where they exist, for a more detailed examination of related and ancillary topics.

It is hoped that this thesis will constitute a valuable contribution to the study of rural, vernacular architecture in Scotland, providing a methodological framework for the study of rural, vernacular housing in other areas, and emphasising the importance of social and cultural context. While the remit of the thesis is to investigate the extent to which socio-cultural change affected housing change in one location over a two hundred year period, a similar approach could also be used to investigate the diversity of housing styles in other geographical areas with similar environments. It is therefore hoped that this study will encourage further research of a similar kind, perhaps covering a wider geographical area. In Lewis, it will add to the small body of knowledge currently available on the nature of these houses, and on their development throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this respect, two articles based on the research undertaken for this thesis have been accepted for publication (Mackie forthcoming a, forthcoming b).

Chapter 1

Approach

Introduction

This chapter examines the concept of vernacular architecture, first of all defining the term, and justifying its use in this thesis. The chapter then introduces the idea that vernacular architecture is an active component of material culture, which both influences, and is influenced by, the world around it. The meaning to be assigned to the terms 'society' and 'culture' is clarified and the notion of '*genre de vie*' is introduced and explained within the context of this thesis. This chapter then gives a brief summary of the various ways in which vernacular architecture has been dealt with within the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, psychology, and behavioural and cultural studies, as a prelude to a description of the specific focus and aims of this thesis, including a justification for the choice of an interdisciplinary approach.

1.1 Vernacular Architecture

The use of the term 'vernacular' in relation to architecture, although first used in the mid-nineteenth century, only became popular in the 1950s and 1960s (Oliver 1997: xxii). It is used today to describe architecture that is generally user-built and designed using local materials, technologies and knowledge; that protects the inhabitants from extremes of weather, making the best use of the immediate environment; and that is best-suited to the inhabitants' way of life and ideas of comfort (ibid.: xxii). As yet, however, there has been no widely-accepted definition of the term 'vernacular architecture'. It has become synonymous over the years with terms such as 'shelter', 'indigenous', 'folk', 'traditional' and 'rural', and terms that, today, have derogatory connotations such as 'primitive' and 'peasant' have also been widely used (cf. Rapoport 1969a). There are problems with using any one of these terms as a definition in itself. For example, using the term 'rural' would also encompass architect-designed structures such as castles, as would the term

'traditional' (Oliver 1997: xxi-ii).[2] One reason for this lack of a common understanding is that, until recently, this type of architecture has largely been ignored by scholars. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that it started to gain a wider audience, particularly after Bernard Rudofsky's 1964-65 exhibition and subsequent publication, *Architecture Without Architects* (1964). Another reason why no single definition has come into standard usage is that, as vernacular architecture covers such a wide range of cultures, designs, and environments throughout the world, it is almost impossible for one definition to cover all the varieties and variables (Oliver 1997: xxii).

Rapoport (1969a) distinguishes between what he calls 'primitive architecture' and 'vernacular architecture'. 'Primitive architecture', he defines simply as the architecture of those societies which are classed as 'primitive' by anthropologists: 'The term primitive, therefore, does not refer to the builders' intentions or abilities, but rather to the society in which they build. It is of course a relative term; to future societies we will undoubtedly appear rather primitive' (Rapoport 1969a: 3). 'Primitive' refers, therefore, to a type of architecture constructed by a society which is less technologically and economically 'advanced' than our own, and in which the social organization of the society reflects this 'primitivenesss'. In such societies, 'the average family has all the available technical knowledge', and houses are constructed by the people themselves, without the need for specialised builders (Rapoport 1969a: 3). In any 'primitive' society, architecture also tends to conform to a particular model, as it is the product of the society and culture as a whole, rather than of an individual, and all houses tend, therefore, to be built to a similar design.

According to Rapoport (1969a), 'vernacular architecture' is representative of a society which is slightly more advanced than that of a 'primitive society', in that a certain amount of specialisation has occurred. While each member of the society still has the required knowledge to construct their own houses, specialist builders (themselves usually members of that society) are often employed to take on some of

[2] Although all vernacular architecture, including the houses which are the focus of this thesis, is traditional (i.e. belonging to a particular building tradition), not all traditional houses could be described as vernacular.

the work. Although the basic housing type remains the same because all houses are built to an identical model, there is more individual variation in architectural design than occurs in 'primitive' societies:

> When a tradesman builds a farmhouse for a peasant, they both know the type in question, the form or model, and even the materials. What remains to be determined are the specifics – family requirements (although this is also less variable than is true today), size (depending on wealth), and relation to the site and micro-climate (Rapoport 1969a: 4).

Rapoport's definition of 'vernacular architecture' (which he also terms 'preindustrial vernacular', to distinguish it from 'modern vernacular', architecture)[3] is therefore architecture for which there is a uniform and accepted model, which may then be adapted, without any conscious attempt at aestheticism, to suit the needs of the site and of the individual (Rapoport 1969a: 4-6):

> In effect, vernacular design is best defined as being based on the use of a model with variations and differing from primitive design in the extent of the variations. The model is not questioned and is self-evident for any given group. It is accepted and adjusted to specific requirements and this makes it very specific to its context and place (Rapoport 1980: 286).

The model is one born of tradition, 'the result of the collaboration of many people over many generations' (Rapoport 1969a: 6), and it is accepted because of this:

> Tradition has the force of a law honoured by everyone through collective assent. It is thus accepted and obeyed, since respect for tradition gives collective control, which acts as a discipline. This approach works because there is a shared image of life, an accepted model of buildings, a small number of building types, and, finally, an accepted hierarchy and hence an accepted settlement pattern. As long as the tradition is alive, this shared and accepted image operates; when tradition goes, the picture changes. Without tradition, there can no longer be reliance on the accepted norms, and there is the beginning of institutionalization (Rapoport 1969a: 6).

Institutionalisation occurs when traditional, home-grown, models cease to become relevant and when models from outside the society become accepted into it. The first step towards the institutionalisation of vernacular architecture, according to Rapoport (1969a: 6), is the introduction of pattern books. As we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, this is precisely what occurred to vernacular housing in Lewis.

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[3] What Rapoport (1969a: 7) terms 'modern vernacular' architecture primarily refers to modern architecture which has 'originated outside the design professions', such as motels and drive-ins – all of which follow a standard type or model. This type of vernacular architecture is beyond the current remit and will not be discussed in this thesis.

One other important feature of 'vernacular architecture', according to Rapoport (1969a: 5-6), is its 'additive quality' and its 'open-ended nature'. In other words, it can be changed and added to without reference to aesthetic value. With reference to Redfield (1965: 68-69), Rapoport also suggests that 'primitive' and 'vernacular' societies might be distinguished by their relation, or lack of relation, to another society of a higher social class. Whereas primitive cultures are self-contained and isolated from other, 'higher', cultures, vernacular cultures (or 'peasant' cultures) 'must be seen in the context of the coexisting high cultures. They are replenished and influenced by the high culture because they are aware of it and the high and low cultures are interdependent and affect each other' (Rapoport 1969a: 4).[4]

Possibly the most concise, and yet comprehensive, definition of 'vernacular architecture', and the one to which I adhere in this thesis, was proposed by Oliver (1997: xxii-iii), in his 'Introduction' to the *Encyclopaedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (*EVAW*):

> Vernacular architecture comprises the dwellings and all other buildings of the people. Related to their environmental contexts and available resources, they are customarily owner- or community-built, utilizing traditional technologies. All forms of vernacular architecture are built to meet specific needs, accommodating the values, economies and ways of living of the cultures that produce them.

Oliver's definition does not differentiate between primitive and vernacular societies and is therefore more suited to this thesis, which examines one society over a period of time and which sees it transform from what might be classified by some as a 'primitive' society, through a 'vernacular' society, to a 'modern' society. His definition is directly applicable to those houses which are the focus of this study. Their design was influenced by the geography of the area in which they were built, by the climate of the region, and by the materials available. They were built by the people who lived in them, or by local specialised builders, and they were built for the people and their way of life, with knowledge that had been handed down from generation to generation. While the above description does not specify that vernacular architecture is rural, in practice, the study of vernacular architecture has,

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[4] Although terms such as 'high culture', 'low culture', 'peasant', and 'primitive' may seem, today, to be judgmental and condescending, in the 1960s this type of language was accepted as being scholarly and descriptive and did not have such pejorative connotations as it now has.

until now, dealt largely, and perhaps primarily, with architecture in rural areas. This thesis therefore comprises an examination of rural vernacular architecture in Lewis.

1.2 The Nature of Vernacular Architecture

At this point, it is appropriate to look at what might be called the 'nature' of vernacular architecture, and, to a certain extent, of architecture in general. This can best be achieved through a discussion of those factors that influence vernacular architecture, and with reference to the relationship between vernacular architecture and the society and culture that produced it.

Implicit in both of the above definitions of vernacular architecture is the notion that vernacular architecture, while adapted to a particular physical environment (climate, geography, materials, etc.), is principally a socio-cultural phenomenon. I now wish to make this connection between society, culture, and vernacular more explicit. However, before turning to socio-cultural considerations, I shall first address the effects of the physical environment on vernacular architecture.

1.2.1 The Physical Environment – Climate, Geography and Geology

Architecture designed by architects is, to an extent, independent of the environment in which it is built. For example, high-rise buildings can enable a large number of people to live or work on a relatively small piece of land; internal air-conditioning can provide the desired interior climate; sheet metal, bevelled glass, carved stone, or speciality bricks, can be prefabricated in one area or country, and transported to another to be incorporated into a building. Vernacular architecture, however, has to work with the environment, using only the materials it has to hand, for example naturally occurring materials such as stone, timber, and clay, and materials (such as flotsam and jetsam) which are brought to the area by natural occurrences. The ruins of existing buildings might also provide building material for new, vernacular houses, and it will be shown in Chapter 7 that those houses that are the subject of this study were, in their turn, reintegrated into a new form of dwelling.

The physical environment can affect vernacular architecture in a number of ways. The geography of an area affects the site of a building. In some cases a good site can be easy to find or adapt, and in others less so. A definition of 'good site' might be dependent on a number of factors, depending on what is desirable in that community. Some communities may build houses in naturally sheltered areas, while others might build on sites close to the sea or close to good farming land. If the desired site happens to be on ground unsuitable for constructing a house, measures might be taken to adapt the site to make it more suitable, such as draining land which is waterlogged. The geography and geology of an area also influences the materials available for building. In some areas these can be major influences, such as an abundance, or a complete lack, of timber or stone. In Lewis, for example, there is almost a complete lack of naturally grown timber, and islanders had to rely on driftwood for the construction of roofs. The climate determines to a certain extent what type of building will survive in the area, and also what structures will provide the inhabitants with climatic resources and protection. For example, enough sunlight in the house at certain times of the day may be a necessity, as may a through draught in a barn as an aid to winnowing. However, although climate, geography and geology can have a significant impact on the design of vernacular architecture, these are not the only, nor indeed the primary, influential factors, for, in any given physical environment, there is always more than one architectural solution: 'A house is a *human* fact, and even with the most severe physical constraints and limited technology man has built in ways so diverse that they can be attributed only to *choice*, which involves cultural values' (Rapoport 1969a: 48).

1.2.2 The Social and Cultural Environment

Rapoport's seminal work, *House Form and Culture*, published in 1969, was the first to examine vernacular architecture with a view to identifying and understanding the variety of determinants of the built form. He looked at a wide range of areas and cultures, focusing on 'primitive' and 'vernacular' architecture, and he showed that although factors such as climate, materials, and defence do play a part in the design of vernacular architecture, they are not the only, nor indeed the primary, factors. His book was, in some ways, a rally against the many previous determinist studies that

favoured the physical environment as the determining factor in the design of vernacular architecture. Rapoport's main argument against invoking deterministic explanations in this way is not so much that it favours one factor but rather that it excludes all others. Thus a cultural determinist view could also be criticized:

> The exclusive, or inevitable, action of cultural factors is equally as untenable as any other single determinant and we need to recognize a valid middle ground. The need to consider many factors is, in the final analysis, the main argument against any determinist view (Rapoport 1969a: 45).

His basic hypothesis is that 'house form is not simply the result of physical forces or any single causal factor, but is the consequence of a whole range of socio-cultural factors seen in their broadest terms' (Rapoport 1969a: 47). In his opinion, although physical factors do influence the built form, they are best seen as secondary, or 'modifying', factors. They may determine what can and cannot be done by virtue of climate conditions or available materials, but it is the socio-cultural factors that principally shape what is built:

> Because building a house is a cultural phenomenon, its form and organization are greatly influenced by the cultural milieu to which it belongs. [...] Given solutions or adaptations do not always occur simply because they are possible. The physical setting provides the possibilities among which choices are made [...] Even when the physical possibilities are numerous, the actual choices may be severely limited by the cultural matrix' (Rapoport 1969a: 46-47).

According to Rapoport (1969a: 46), '[i]f provision of shelter is the passive function of the house then its positive purpose is the creation of an environment best suited to the way of life of a people – in other words, a social unit of space'. Houses may therefore be seen as socio-cultural constructs, built to answer the socio-cultural needs of the people in the most perfect way possible, the constraints of material and environment aside. They are not just places of shelter, or of defence, or simply places to eat or sleep; they are 'ideal environments reflecting different world views and ways of life' (ibid.: 48) and they can therefore be understood as being 'the *direct* expression of changing values, images, perceptions, and ways of life, as well as of certain constancies' (ibid.: 12).

It will be useful, at this point, to say a few words about the definitions of 'culture' and 'society'. I propose that, for the purpose of this thesis, 'culture' be defined in terms of

beliefs, customs, and values. This encompasses the traditions of a people, their habits, knowledge, religion, social values and expectations, norms, accepted behaviour, ideas about comfort and privacy, and self perception – in other words, as philosopher Ken Wilber (1995: 122) puts it, the 'interior' world of a people. Culture thus consists of that which cannot be easily observed and explained from the outside: the *meaning* behind the actions. 'Society' or 'social system', on the other hand, encompasses the 'exterior' (ibid.: 122), or visible, world such as the social hierarchy, the economic situation, the system of land tenure, occupations, and even the yearly agricultural cycle. Society, in other words, is that which can be directly perceived by an external observer, whereas culture reflects the understanding that exists within the community.

Culture can affect vernacular architecture in a number of ways and on a number of levels. Notions of comfort, accepted levels of sanitation, ideas about privacy, are all played out in the design of the vernacular house, and what may be acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another. A community's spiritual beliefs and social values may also be demonstrated physically within and around the house. In some vernacular houses, certain parts of the house are predominantly male or female and in some cases houses are orientated in such as way as to seemingly reflect the world view of the people – as, for example, with the Navajo *hogan* (Rapoport 1969b: 75).[5] Rituals may also be involved in the building or occupying of a house, either because of their religious significance, or just as a custom, and individual elements of the house, such as the hearth, or the ridge-pole, may be loaded with symbolic meaning.

Social factors can have perhaps more obvious effects on vernacular architecture. In fishing communities the way of life generally requires settlement close to water. In agricultural communities, houses are built, where possible, on sites near fertile land, and are designed to provide space for animals, if necessary, and for agricultural equipment. The system of land tenure may have been put in place by a higher authority, and the economic situation may influence the size of the houses or the level of specialisation in building construction.

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[5] The *hogan* is the name of the type of circular dwelling built by the Navajo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona (Rapoport 1969b).

The influence of society and culture on vernacular architecture, however, is only one half of a two-way process, for, as the embodiment of social and cultural values, the house (and the built environment as a whole) plays an active role in the restructuring of these values in everyday life. The idea that not only do people influence their built environment, but that the built environment, in turn, influences people, is one that has been put forward by a number of scholars within a variety of academic disciplines, such as anthropology (e.g. Waterson 1993), psychology (e.g. Altman 1984), environment-behaviour studies (e.g. Rapoport 1969a, 1980, 1982), and, particularly over the last twenty-five years, in archaeology (e.g. Hodder 1982; Hillier and Hanson 1984; Bailey 1990). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in his study of the Berber house, described the house as a 'book' which 'is read with the body, in and through the movements and displacements which make the space within which they are enacted as much as they are made by it' (Bourdieu 1977: 90). It is his contention that children growing up in these houses will automatically absorb the notions and values about human relationships that exist in that society, especially with regard to the relationships between genders. This is what Rapoport (1982) calls 'non-verbal communication': an effective way of transmitting culture and tradition between generations, by manifesting them in the built form. The house, therefore, becomes 'an active component of the material culture world' (Bailey 1990: 28) and, as such, can provide the discerning researcher with a 'window' on a particular society and culture, at any given point in time (cf. Jackson 1964; Altman and Chemers 1984: 156).

This reflexive relationship between the socio-cultural environment and the built environment means that we can both learn about the society and culture of a people by studying their built environment (including their houses), and better understand the built environment by placing it in its social and cultural context. This is particularly true when dealing with vernacular architecture because the society and culture of the people are more accurately portrayed in their built environment than is often the case in a modern society.

1.2.3 *Genre de Vie*

The term '*genre de vie*' was first introduced by French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache in his 1911 article in *Annales de Géographie*, 'Les genres de vie dans la géographie humaine'. Vidal de la Blache died six years later and it was not until 1948 that another French geographer, Max Sorre, published an article, 'La notion de genre de vie et sa valeur actuelle', in the same journal, in which he expands on Vidal de la Blaches's theory, using contemporary examples.[6] In Sorre's words, 'the concept [of *genre de vie*] is extremely rich because it embraces most, if not all, of the activities of a group and even of individuals' (Sorre 1962: 399). He suggests that it can be looked at as a 'combination of techniques', material, spiritual, and social, which represent the 'ability of a group to utilize the possibilities of its environment' (ibid.: 400). Describing the techniques of living employed by groups of people in their native environment, such as animal husbandry and pastoral nomadism, Sorre includes also the spiritual practices associated with such a way of life. For example, fertility rites and rain dances can be considered just as much a part of their 'way of life' as the physical, or material, techniques:

> In addition to visible material elements, we must also include non-material or spiritual elements, and we must of course also consider social elements, for the development of a *genre de vie* is inconceivable apart from the atmosphere of an organized society (Sorre 1962: 400).

I suggest that, for the purpose of this thesis, *genre de vie* be interpreted as the combined elements of society and culture, as defined above. With regard to the built environment, Sorre writes that 'the settlement pattern, agrarian structure, system of land tenure, and mode of exploitation provide material evidence of the functions of the *genre de vie*' (ibid.: 401). This can also be applied, as Rapoport (1969a: 47) suggests, to buildings: 'The term *genre de vie* used by Max Sorre includes all the cultural, spiritual, material, and social aspects which affect form. We can therefore say that houses and settlements are the physical expressions of the *genre de vie*'.

In different societies, different elements of the *genre de vie* may be predominant: 'All traits do not have the same functional or temporal significance. Some are at the very

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[6] This has since been published in English as 'The Concept of Genre De Vie' (Sorre 1962).

foundation of a *genre de vie* and act as forces of creation or organization, while others carry on functions of conservation and fixation' (Sorre 1962: 400). Elements may also function differently in different societies and there can therefore be much variation in the 'physical expression' (Rapoport 1969a: 47) of *genre de vie* between societies that appear quite similar. Over time also, developments in certain elements of *genre de vie* will lead to changes in the whole which can affect the way it is represented in the material world. If the built environment is recognised as a physical manifestation of *genre de vie*, then it must also be accepted that a changing *genre de vie* would be reflected in a changing built environment.

The term '*genre de vie*', therefore, serves as a useful contrast to 'the physical environment' with regard to influences on vernacular architecture, reducing the need to classify each individual factor under its relevant heading of 'society' or 'culture'. This is particularly useful because elements of society and culture are not independent of one another; rather they form part of a web of elements whereby movement in one strand induces movement in those around it, and so on. Each custom, for example, is a product of a particular society and culture (or *genre de vie*), and has been created as a result of the interaction of all of the components in that particular *genre de vie*; it is not simply a product of other customs or other cultural factors. Thus, it is useful to be able to group together society and culture under the heading *genre de vie*. In some instances, however, it may be beneficial to be more specific when describing a particular element, and thus the use of the term *genre de vie* will not exclude the use of the terms 'social' and 'cultural' in this thesis but will be used alongside them, where appropriate.

1.3 Approaches to Vernacular Architecture

Since the upsurge of interest in vernacular architecture in the 1960s, many disciplines have become involved in this type of research, all of which have their own particular approach. However, as yet, there have been relatively few studies conducted by interdisciplinary teams (Oliver 2003: 12) and it should be noted that:

> As yet there is no clearly defined and specialized discipline for the study of dwellings or the larger compass of vernacular architecture. If such a discipline

> were to emerge it would probably be one that combines some of the elements of both architecture and anthropology with aspects of history and geography (Oliver 2003: 13).

There follows a very brief description of the approaches that certain disciplines have taken, as they have turned to vernacular architecture as a worthwhile area of study. This is by no means an attempt to fully explain the ideas behind each approach, nor are these the only approaches favoured by these disciplines. However, they demonstrate the range of themes and interests which have evolved from the study of vernacular architecture, many of which have informed my own approach. Research specifically pertaining to Lewis will be detailed in the next chapter.

Since the 1960s, anthropologists have focused on trying to understand vernacular architecture in its local context (Schefold 1997: 6), looking at what it reveals about the society that built it (Waterson 1993: xv), and often investigating the influences on architectural form (Rapoport 1969a; Schefold 1997: 6). Roxana Waterson's *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia* (1993) is a good example of anthropological work which looks both at the architecture and the meaning behind it. Waterson's study covers a very wide area, and begins by discussing 'recurring elements of architectural style' that occur in housing throughout the area, while looking at their possible origins and at the 'technological and cosmological considerations behind them' (Waterson 1993: xviii). She then goes on to look at the people who constitute the house and the kinship system and, further on, 'to examine how social relations define the uses of space within the house, and how rules about space in turn oblige individuals to act out these relations in their own movements' (ibid.: xviii). In a similar vein, this thesis seeks to understand the changes that took place in rural vernacular housing Lewis, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by looking at changes in society and culture that were reflected in the built environment.

This action of the built environment on the individual, or group, has been one of the main focuses of the behavioural sciences, whose practitioners have studied how behaviour creates and is, in turn, created, or reinforced, by the vernacular environment. (Rapoport 1997: 16). Much research in this area has been carried out within environment-behaviour studies. In this approach, a distinction is made

between two types of behaviour: behaviour that creates vernacular environments, and behaviour which occurs as a product of vernacular environments (ibid.: 16). Rapoport, possibly the leading proponent of this field, believes that environment-behaviour studies can essentially be defined by its attempt to answer three key questions:

> 1. What are the characteristics of people, as members of the species, as individuals and as members of various groups ranging from families to societies that shape the environment and, in design, should shape the environment so that it is congruent with these characteristics and supportive of them?
>
> 2. In what ways do which attributes of environments affect what groups of people in which ways, under what sets of circumstances, why and how?
>
> 3. Given this two-way interaction of people and environments, they must be linked in some ways: What are the mechanisms that link them?
>
> (Rapoport n.d.)

In Rapoport's approach, behaviour is understood as an expression of a 'cultural landscape' which comprises 'systems of activities' that take place in 'systems of settings' (Rapoport 1997: 16-17). The activities occurring in any given setting vary between cultures and also over time (diurnally, seasonally, or as a result of evolution within the society). An example of seasonal variation would be the use, in many cultures, of summer and winter dwellings in which different activities take place in response to changing climatic conditions or agricultural needs (ibid.: 16-17).

Environment-behaviour studies, sometimes called 'environmental psychology', includes within its broad remit the attempt to understand vernacular architecture in terms of cognitive processes. This involves investigating the perceptions and thought processes of individuals and groups and relating these to the construction of the vernacular environment in order to find the 'underlying rationale of built form' (Stea 1997: 19-21). In such studies, the 'knowledge' of the builder(s) is of prime importance (ibid.: 19-21). The approach adopted in this thesis is one which also tries to determine the reasons behind decisions of the tenants and those in authority to implement, or not implement, particular housing changes, in order to reach the 'underlying rationale' of the house at particular points in time. This thesis therefore seeks to investigate the extent to which changes in human thinking and behaviour, as

manifest, for example, in daily tasks, customs, beliefs, and traditions, influenced the construction, use, and design of rural vernacular housing in Lewis over a two hundred year period.

Within the field of ethnography, the relationship between architecture and culture is now of prime importance and is studied by first hand observation. Information is generally collected through interviewing the people concerned about their beliefs and knowledge of the environment they live in. Rather than being seen as merely another artefact, architecture is now regarded as containing a wealth of information about social behaviour and about symbolism and meaning. 'Architectural ethnography' focuses not only on the building itself, but also on the relationships between the people, the building, and the objects housed within it. In this way, ethnographic studies of vernacular architecture have begun to branch into theory rather than being purely descriptive, as in the past (Egenter 1997: 34-35). In Lewis, although the houses that are the subject of this study are no longer lived in, a wealth of information can still be found in the area by studying what is left of the houses themselves, as well as through information provided by the people who lived among them and who, through their memories, can bring them back to life.

A diffusionist approach to the study of vernacular architecture is one which looks at the spread of architectural styles and traits between cultures, primarily, but not always, through migration of peoples. This approach identifies not only cross-cultural constancies and similarities, but also ways in which changes in vernacular architecture occur after diffusion (Domenig 1997: 28-29). This thesis examines these processes of diffusion, alongside other ways in which housing change may occur.

In archaeology, the focus has been on settlement archaeology and, more recently, on ethnoarchaeology (Hodder 1982), where material culture and behaviour are combined to give new insights into the design and use of buildings (Fedick 1997: 9). Bailey (1990: 19), for example, states that '[a]n archaeology of houses is an archaeology of space, of artefacts, and of people'. A number of archaeologists have also started looking at the spatial analysis of buildings, in order to determine the way

in which space was used in the building, in the belief that it might shed light on the social relations taking place within it. In some cases, access to buildings and rooms, and thus movement throughout the building, has been schematised geometrically (Hillier and Hanson: 1984; Foster: 1989). In others, the space has been analysed through diagrams and through the use of ethnographic techniques, particularly where a symbolic spatial arrangement is postulated (Parker Pearson and Richards 1994: 1-73). Of particular interest to this thesis, is the recent trend in British archaeology towards rural settlement studies which takes a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to the study of Medieval or later rural settlements, combining traditional archaeological approaches with the study of, for example, social history, folklore, and ethnology (Dalglish 2000). This thesis has used the physical remains of the houses under study, along with written and oral evidence, to investigate the nature of the houses as they were lived in, and to determine the extent to which various social and cultural factors influenced the design and use of the house.

Although to a certain extent, each discipline has its own unique viewpoint from which to study vernacular architecture, most of them incorporate into their models approaches borrowed from other disciplines, and therefore are themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, interdisciplinary. It should also be noted that most recent approaches are, to a large extent, anthropological in nature, in that they involve the study, not just of architecture, but of the people and the society and culture to which the architecture belongs. It might even be argued that the study of vernacular architecture is essentially an anthropological endeavour, given that the buildings are products of a particular culture and society.

1.4 A Suitable Approach

It can be deduced, from the descriptions above, that any approach to the study of vernacular architecture is dependant primarily on three things: (1) the surviving physical evidence (for example, the archaeological remains of a prehistoric community in Europe as compared to the yurts of a nomadic community in Mongolia); (2) the documentary sources and oral testimony available; (3) the focus, or aim, of the research, which, to some extent, is also conditioned by the materials

and evidence available (for example, a focus on the development of a certain type of hearth in the west of Ireland, or on the symbolism displayed in the layout of a certain type of house in South East Asia). Even so, there is no single right approach to the study of vernacular architecture. On the contrary, there can be as many approaches as there are studies, and new approaches are being developed continually to suit individual research needs.

A good starting point, however, in determining a suitable approach, would be to investigate, as I have done above, a range of approaches that have already been successfully implemented in the study of vernacular architecture. Any one approach, or combination of approaches, must then be adapted to suit the needs of the particular study and, in particular, the aims and interests of the individual researcher.

The evidence and sources I am dealing with in this study are as follows.[7] There is physical evidence in the form of houses, in varying degrees of ruin. Some of these were abandoned in the early nineteenth century, while others were abandoned as late as the mid-twentieth century. None of the houses is presently occupied. There is a variety of documentary sources, mostly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although some references are available from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which will help to set the historical scene. The *genre de vie* that existed when these houses were built and occupied has changed; even since the 1960s there have been significant social and cultural changes in the island. Evidence can also be gained from oral sources. There are people still living in the area who were brought up in houses that were not abandoned until well into the twentieth century, and who can provide information not only about the houses but also about changes in *genre de vie*, during the period in question.

The aim of the research is to investigate to what extent the social and cultural environment, or *genre de vie*, affected the construction, design and use of the houses in Bragar. It is a diachronic, rather than a synchronic, study, concerned with the changes in house design and use, and with the changing *genre de vie*, in one area, over a period of two hundred years. In *House Form and Culture* (1969a), Rapoport

[7] More detailed information about methodology and sources will be given in Chapter 2.

looks at vernacular architecture from a 'specific point of view analysing the buildings themselves rather than trying to trace their development' (Rapoport 1969a: 15). Although he lists a number of problems which confront the researcher who tries to study vernacular architecture chronologically – not least because it is often 'distinguished by lack of change' (ibid.: 15) – he adds that it is possible to conduct such a study by 'taking a specific place and trying to understand the forms of dwellings and settlements in the light of history, location, social aspects, climate, materials, construction techniques, and other variables' (ibid.: 15). The place and period I am studying lend themselves very well to a chronological study, particularly as this period was one that was characterized by change, which has been well documented and dated in a variety of sources:

> The different forms taken by dwellings are a complex phenomenon for which no single explanation will suffice. All possible explanations, however, are variations on a single theme: people with very different attitudes and ideals respond to varied physical environments. These responses vary from place to place because of changes and differences in the interplay of social, cultural, ritual, economic, and physical factors. These factors and responses may also change gradually in the same place with the passage of time (Rapoport 1969a: 46).

My approach, therefore, borrows from a number of different disciplines, to varying degrees. To a large extent my research follows an anthropological path. I am studying a society and its architecture – the way the houses were built and lived in, the changing relationship between a people and their built environment, and the various influences on the design and use of the house. However, the vernacular dwellings I am studying are no longer lived in, and the way of life I am examining, to all intents and purposes, no longer exists. In this respect my approach is also historical and archaeological. The houses I am studying are in ruins and I am trying to reconstruct, in the manner of rural settlement studies, a picture of what they, and the society around them, were like in the past. However, none of the ruins I have examined in Bragar has been excavated.

One other important distinction between my research and a typical anthropological study is that although I have spent a combined total of sixty-seven days in Lewis conducting research, I have been based in Edinburgh and, as Clifford Geertz (1975:

22) eloquently puts it: '[a]nthropologists don't study villages; they study *in* villages'. Anthropologists, however, study in living communities, in contrast to the community at the centre of this thesis. Although the amount of time spent on Lewis has been determined somewhat by both time and financial constraints, I believe that through an initial broad investigation, I have been able to narrow down the focus of this research, and the work involved in it, in order that an efficient and effective study can be completed within these boundaries. To further distinguish my approach from an anthropological one, I am studying these dwellings, and life in and around these dwellings diachronically, i.e. not at one point in time, but as a development over two centuries, from the earliest designs we have knowledge of, to their most recent incarnations.

As my research is concerned not only with houses but with people, and with their relationship to the houses, there is also a certain amount of cognitive and behavioural research involved. This is difficult to accomplish to any great degree in a society that, essentially, no longer exists. However, the changing attitude of the people to ideas about privacy and sanitation, their changing ideas about what was desirable in a house, and the changes in the way the house was used and organised – in other words changes in the *genre de vie* – can be investigated, and they are all particularly relevant to the development of the house.

There is also an ethnographic side to my research. Although the buildings are no longer lived in, and the *genre de vie* has changed considerably, my study involves the gathering of information about both the houses and the older *genre de vie* from a variety of sources, including personal communications and transcripts of past interviews. It could also be considered ethnographic in that artefacts relating to the house provide additional sources of information, for example the introduction of ornaments in the late nineteenth century. My approach could also be described as having a mildly diffusionist ingredient, in that the introduction and spread of certain housing elements will be discussed, such as introduction of partition walls and the spread of corrugated iron as a walling and roofing material.

My own background has also contributed to both the choice of topic and my approach to it. My interest in this area of research stems from a background in architecture (where I reached Part I of III of the necessary qualifications to become a chartered architect) and a background in Gaelic studies (having spent two years studying at *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*, the Gaelic college in Skye). The decision to study vernacular housing in Lewis therefore reflects a combination of interests.

My background in Gaelic studies has been invaluable to me during the course of this research – probably more so than has my background in architecture. Rural Lewis is one of the few areas of Scotland where the Gaelic language is still spoken on a daily basis, and where children are still being brought up with Gaelic in the home. My knowledge of Gaelic proved extremely beneficial during the course of this study, not least as an ice-breaker as I introduced myself to people and asked for their help in my research. Knowledge of Gaelic has also allowed me to make use of certain linguistic evidence (such as housing terminology) that would otherwise have been passed by, and has afforded me access to certain sources of evidence, such as Matheson's (1849) first set of Rules and Regulations, and the wealth of material collected by the local *Comuinn Eachdraidh* (Historical Societies), that were available only in Gaelic. In addition to this, the language of a people informs their *genre de vie* as an essential part of their identity, and the Gaelic language has certainly played a significant role in Lewis history. An understanding of the history of the area, and of its people, is essential to developing a theory of either socio-cultural or housing change.

My interest in what might be termed a Rapoportian approach to architecture, stems from my discovery, on dusty shelves in libraries rather than in University lecture-rooms, of that part of architectural theory which deals with the human interaction with buildings and, in particular, with people's relationships with their houses. In undertaking this research, my own beliefs in a holistic approach to all aspects of life have informed my decision to approach this subject matter from such a wide perspective. I hope that the fruits of this thesis will attest the benefits of such a broad, interdisciplinary approach.

My quest, therefore, is to go beyond the simple identification and classification of buildings, and the confines of a traditional architectural or archaeological approach to vernacular housing, and rather to look more closely at the human involvement in the development of the Lewis house, while emphasising the importance of the individual and the role of human processes, both in housing change, and in a changing *genre de vie*. My approach might therefore be considered to be broadly anthropological, while using a variety of sources and resources that might be classified as archaeological, ethnographic, historical, and linguistic.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the term 'vernacular architecture', defining it as architecture which is built by the people, for the people, and to meet the specific social and cultural needs of the people, within a particular physical environment, using only naturally available materials. It has been shown while the physical environment does influence the built environment, society and culture (which can usefully be combined under the heading '*genre de vie*') are the most influential factors. It has also been shown that the interaction between the built environment and *genre de vie* is a two way process which results in changes in *genre de vie* being reflected in the built environment, and changes in the built environment being reflected in certain aspects of *genre de vie*. This chapter has summarised a number of approaches to the study of vernacular architecture, within current academic disciplines, and has shown that the approach used in this thesis is a product of a number of different approaches which have been combined and adapted to suit the aims of the thesis and the materials and sources available.

Chapter 2

Methodology and Sources

Introduction

This chapter introduces the township of Bragar, describing both its present layout and what is known of its settlement history. To begin with there is an explanation of the use of the Gaelic language in the thesis, and of the problems inherent in using the terms 'blackhouse' and 'whitehouse'. This chapter then looks at the choice of houses surveyed in Bragar and explains the method of survey and analysis before looking at the available written and oral sources. Any potential problems in dealing with the source materials are discussed here. There follows an introduction to previous research on housing in Lewis and elsewhere in rural Britain, along with the current archaeological evidence available. The next section deals with the method of bringing together the various source materials to form a coherent history, both in housing and in *genre de vie*.

2.1 Language and Terminology

2.1.1 Use of Gaelic in the Thesis

While English is the language of this thesis, the language of the houses and the *genre de vie* I am studying is Gaelic, and a number of Gaelic terms will be used throughout the text. Housing terminology will be given in Gaelic on first use. Where there is a suitable English equivalent, the English term will then be used throughout the text. Where there is no suitable English equivalent, the Gaelic term will be used throughout the text. A glossary of housing terminology (Gaelic to English) is given in Appendix 1.

Although the trend today is often to use Gaelic place-names rather than their English equivalent, this thesis will use English place-names (where suitable English equivalents exist) for ease of reading. Where there is no suitable English equivalent, the names will be given in Gaelic. A glossary of place-names (English to Gaelic) is

given in Appendix 2. A glossary of local place-names and houses (Gaelic to English) is also given in Appendix 2. Where an interview has been conducted in Gaelic and a portion transcribed for inclusion in the thesis, the original Gaelic will be printed, together with an English translation. Likewise, where quotes are given in their original Gaelic, an English translation will be provided.

2.1.2 The Term 'Blackhouse'

The houses I will be discussing in this thesis have, at times, and in various publications, been referred to as 'blackhouses', 'black houses' or 'black-houses'. This term has been widely used, at least since the early nineteenth century, to denote a certain type of vernacular house, found in northern and western Scotland. It is unclear when the term 'blackhouse', which in Gaelic is *taigh dubh*, came into being, or even where it originated. It is commonly thought that it was coined in the second half of the 19th century, with the introduction of the new, stone and lime 'white house', or *taigh geal*, and was used to represent the existing housing of the people (Fenton 1995: 24). However, during the course of this research, I came across a letter amongst the Seaforth Muniments, dated March/April 1819, and addressed to Mr Stewart MacKenzie, who was then owner of Lewis. The letter, from P. Degraves, reads: 'I showed Mr Brown a plan I intended to have carried into effect if I had remained in the Highlands and with which he seemed much pleased, it was a substitute for a black house [...]' (GD46/17/51). This term was therefore obviously in common usage, at least amongst the upper classes, during the early nineteenth century.

A number of other theories have also been tentatively put forward as to the origin of the term. It has been postulated that perhaps, as the Gaelic for 'thatch' is *tughadh* that *tughadh* somehow became *dubh* (Sinclair 1953: 18). Indeed on Tiree a 'thatched house' is a *taigh tugha* rather than *taigh tughaidh* as it is elsewhere in the Hebrides, making it phonologically closer to *taigh dubh*. This is rather unlikely, however, and there is no evidence of the term *taigh dubh* ever being used in Tiree (Boyd 1986: 8). It has also been postulated that the term *taigh dubh* arose from the name sometimes given to the earthen floor in these houses, *ùrlar dubh*, which in English translates

into 'black floor' (MacDougall 1933), or even from the 'dark and dull' appearance of the black houses compared to the white houses (Sinclair 1953: 18). Vogt (1997: 1287) has suggested that it was the lack of chimney that brought about the name as there were few openings in the walls or roof to let in light or to let out the smoke, and the interior was therefore dark and the rafters black with soot. It is still not clear, however, whether the term originated in Gaelic or in English and whether it was coined by the inhabitants of the houses themselves, or by outsiders.

A definition of the term 'blackhouse' can be found in Dwelly's *Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, published in the early 1900s. It seems that, for him, the defining feature of such a house was that it had double-skinned walls. He states that a *taigh dubh* is a 'thatched house, whose walls are dry-built without cement and double, the intervening space being filled with earth. The fire in such houses is generally situated in the middle of the floor' (Dwelly 1993: 923-24). He does not mention whether the house was necessarily a byre-dwelling. In 1883, however, in his *Reminiscences of my Life in the Highlands*, Joseph Mitchell (1883: 232) describes Lewis blackhouses as being byre-dwellings, but built of turf. It is therefore unclear what were the defining features of a 'blackhouse', if indeed there were any. Dwelly (1993: 924) also gives another, presumably earlier, definition of the term *taigh dubh* as being an 'illicit distillery concealed among the hills'. He gives this reference as coming from the west-coast of Ross. Dr. John MacInnes (pers. comm.), formerly of the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, believes that the term *taigh dubh* originally meant an illicit still, and at some point began to be used also to refer to a certain type of house. It may have been that some houses contained illicit stills and therefore adopted the name *taigh dubh*, which later spread to all types of thatched houses; or it may be that, as the term *taigh dubh* existed in the vocabulary, albeit with a different meaning, when the need or desire arose to find a name for these thatched houses, the existing name was deemed appropriate.

Captain F.W.L. Thomas, in his 1867 publication, 'On the Primitive Dwellings and Hypogea of the Outer Hebrides', mentions the term '*tigh dubh*',[8] equating it with an

[8] '*tigh*' is an older form of *taigh* (house).

'ordinary West Highland cottage' (Thomas 1867: 154). He also uses the English term 'black-house' and uses these terms to refer to both single skinned and double skinned houses on the islands and on the western mainland (Thomas 1867: 154-55). The term 'whitehouse', or *taigh geal*, was also in use at this time, as Thomas continues:

> after the lapse of thirteen centuries, the distinctive terms for a house built with lime-mortar, or without it, remain the same; for in the time of St Ninian, the former was Canida [*sic*] casa, in the northern islands it is still a White-house, and in the Western Highlands it is Tigh-gal, while the native structure is a Black-house or Tigh-dubh (Thomas 1867: 154).[9]

Although Thomas points out that the houses of western Lewis had 'peculiar archaeological characteristics' compared to houses on the mainland and houses elsewhere in the islands, he does not suggest that a different term was used, or should be used, to signify them (Thomas 1867: 155). For Thomas, therefore, the defining feature was the lack of use of lime mortar in the construction of the walls. Lord Napier and Ettrick, in his evidence to the Commission for Inquiring into the Housing of the Working Classes in 1885, suggested that it was the method of building and the materials used that distinguished 'black houses' from 'white houses':

> The black houses are those which are built without skilled labour and without imported materials, according to methods familiar to the people of the country. The white houses are the houses built, in part at least, with skilled labour and with materials imported from other places (Dilke 1885: 104).

The Commission also reported on the areas in which 'black houses' could be found, stating that:

> Black houses are common to Skye, the Long Island, and the Western Islands, where they are found in great variety; they may also be seen on the northern and western coasts of the mainland, and to some extent in the central Highlands, but are said to be generally disappearing (Dilke 1885: 9).

In *Evidence* collected by the Commission, the variety of 'black houses' is described by Lord Napier and Ettrick as follows:

> The black houses are all of a simple and rude character, differing, however, materially from each other. There are houses, for instance, in which the entrance is common to the cattle and to the human inhabitants, and in which there is no partition between the byre, the kitchen, and the sleeping apartment; in which all the inhabitants, human and bestial, live under the same roof in the same open space. There are other houses in which there is a common door, but

[9] 'Tigh-gal' is the same as *Taigh-geal* (White-house).

> in which there is a partition between the cattle and the human inhabitants. There are some houses in which there is no window in the wall, but a window in the roof. There are some houses in which there is a fireplace in the centre of the floor, but with no proper chimney. And there are other houses in which there is a chimney, or more than one chimney, in the wall. There are some houses in which, perhaps, there is no window at all, and in which light is admitted entirely by the door or the aperture through which the smoke escapes. There is, therefore, a very great variety in the black houses. Some are altogether such as might be termed unfit for human habitation; others, though of a rude character, are by no means so uncomfortable or so unfit for human dwellings" (Dilke 1885: 104).

It is my contention that there never was such a thing as a definitive 'blackhouse' because the term was never coined to be used as such. To the people who lived in these houses, there was probably no need for any term other than 'house'. When more modern houses became common, however, there was, perhaps, the need for classification. Nowadays the term is used to describe a wide variety of housing types throughout the western Highlands and Islands. Due to the ambiguity surrounding the term 'blackhouse', it will be used in this thesis primarily when referring to other publications.

The term 'whitehouse', or 'white house', principally used to describe the more modern, stone and lime or concrete houses, will also be used with caution as there was more than one type of modern house being built in Lewis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. All houses will therefore be defined in this thesis based on their attributes.

2.2 The Isle of Lewis

The Outer Hebrides (also known as the Western Isles, or the Long Island), constitute a string of islands, approximately 130 miles in length, situated between thirty and sixty miles from the western mainland of Scotland (Map 1). The Isle of Lewis is the most northerly of these islands and is connected to the Isle of Harris between Loch Resort in the west and Loch Seaforth in the east (Map 2). Although constituting one physical island, Lewis and Harris have historically been considered as separate islands, being under the ownership of different Highland clans. While Harris was

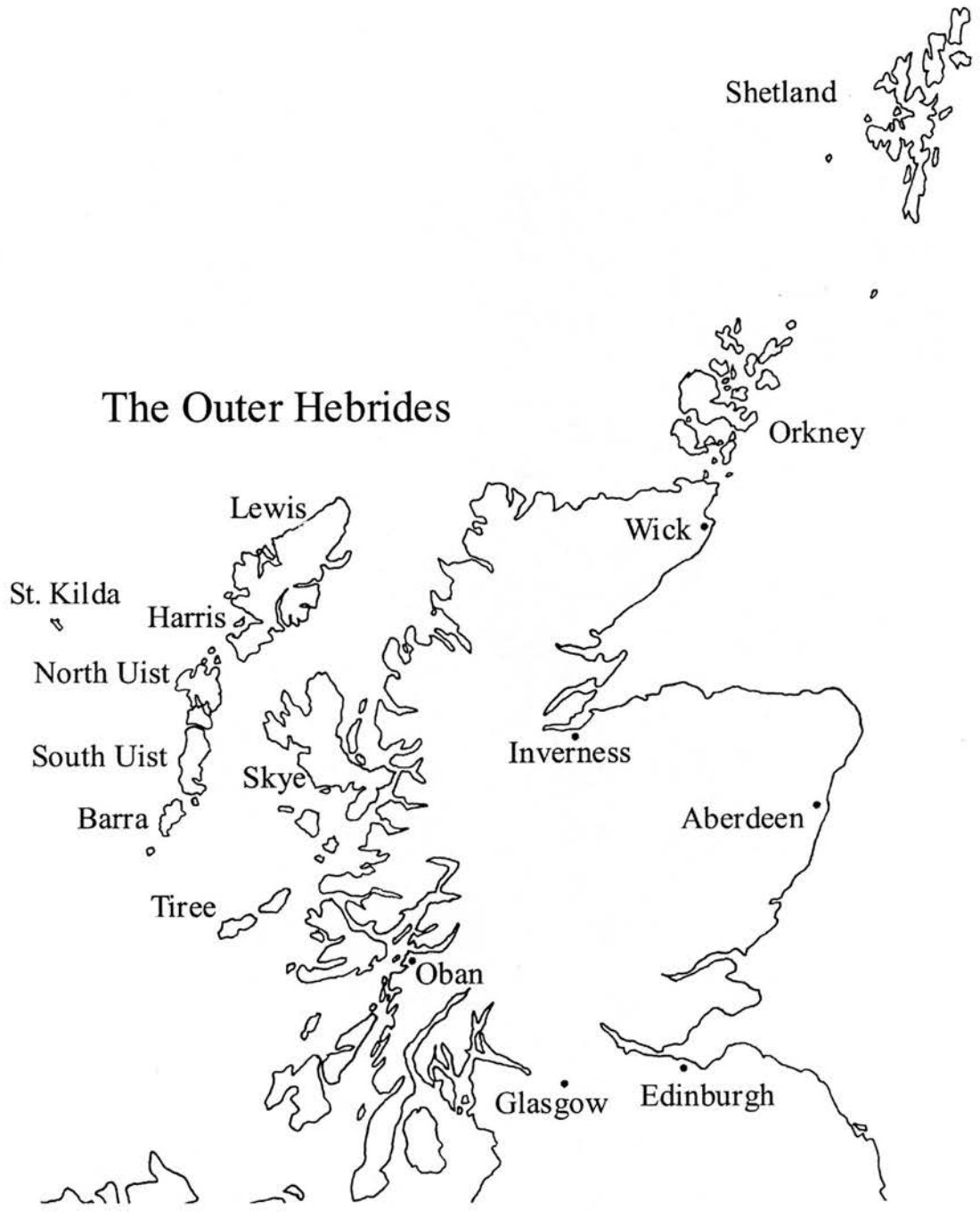
ruled by the MacLeods (a branch of the MacLeods of Dunvegan), Lewis was under the control of the MacAulays, Morisons, and MacLeods prior to 1610 when the island was gifted to the MacKenzies of Kintail. Throughout most of the twentieth century, until the establishment of *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* (Western Isles Council) in 1975, Lewis and Harris were also in different administrative regions with Lewis being a part of Ross and Cromarty, and Harris a part of Inverness-shire.

Physically, the two islands are quite different. Harris is much more mountainous, with large parts of the island lying over 500 feet above sea level and surrounded by hill pastures (Geddes 1955: 35, 50). The geography of Lewis is, for the most part, fairly flat, with large expanses of *monadh*, or moor, covering the centre of the island and settlements mostly strung out along the coastal areas. Around the coast there are a number of sandy beaches (the best known being at Uig), and a number of shingle beaches, such as at Bragar, which provide access to the sea (Geddes 1955: 35, 38-39, 47, 50).

Although the climate of Lewis is generally mild, without extremes of temperature, it is exposed to a substantial amount of wind and rain. The prevailing wind in Lewis is south-westerly, although northerly and easterly winds are also common, especially in spring and summer, and gale force winds are not unusual (Geddes 1955: 42-45). Any house built in these conditions would have to be stable enough to withstand high winds, preferably sitting low to the ground and without any openings on the side of the prevailing wind.

Due to the excess of peat and the expanse of *monadh*, not to mention the high winds, trees are few on the island. There are virtually none on the West Side, leaving drift-wood as the main source of timber for house, furniture and equipment building. The geology of the island, however, a solid bed of Lewisian Gneiss which is easily eroded and split, has left plenty of local stone for building (Geddes 1955: 33-36). The stone is so prevalent that land for crops often had to be cleared of stones before being cultivated. The abundant peat was used for fuel and for thatching and, in some instances, complete buildings were constructed from blocks of peat. Under the peat, which was, and in some areas still is, cut yearly for fuel, the lower layer of clay was

exposed (Geddes 1955: 40). This clay was used in house building and also for making pottery (Hugh Cheape, pers. comm.). Map 3 shows the distribution of vegetation on the island (Geddes 1955: 50).



Map 1: Scotland (by the author)

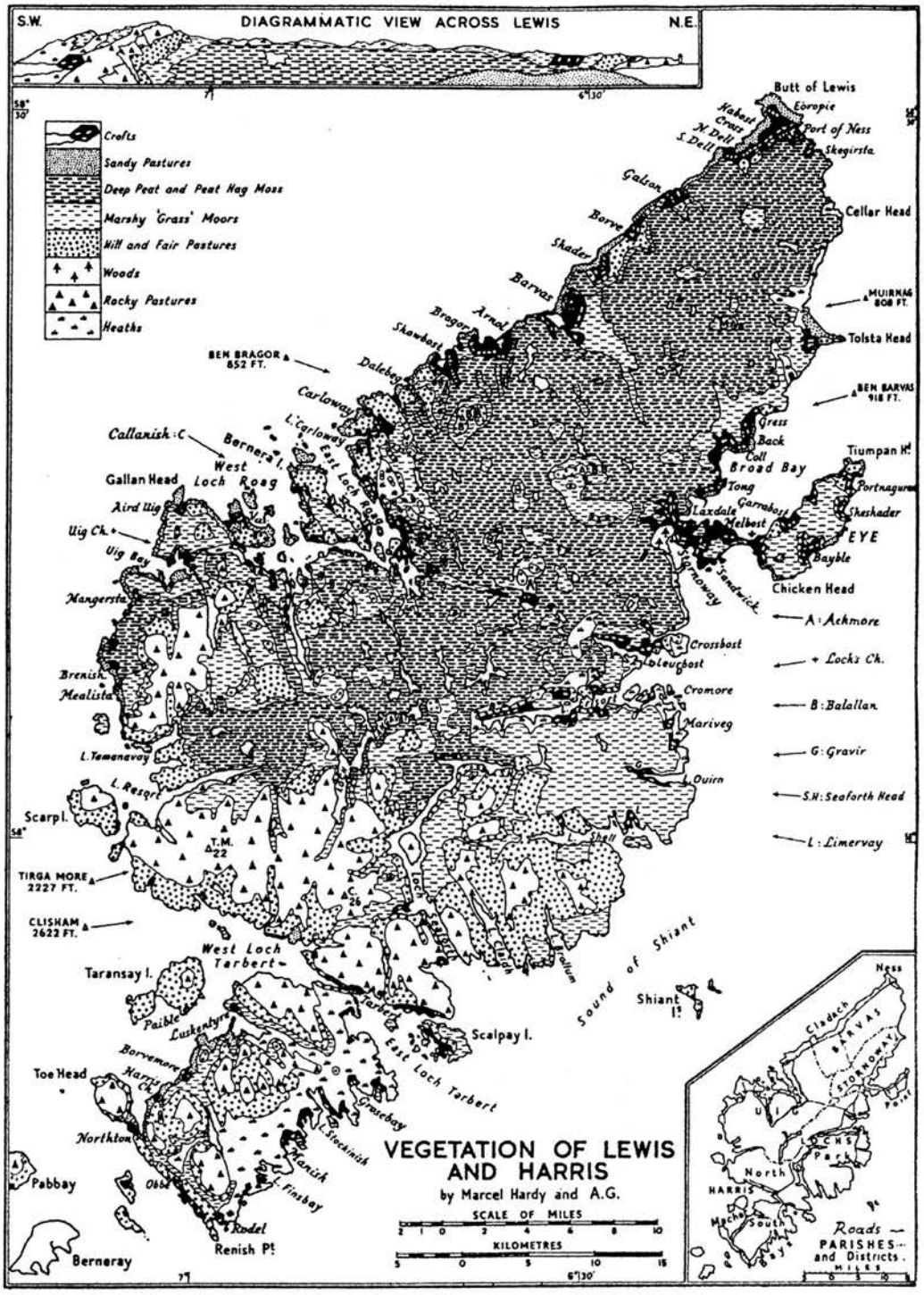
Map 2: Lewis and Harris (by the author)

The average rainfall on the island, measured in Stornoway, over the thirty years from 1971 to 2000, is measured at 1231.7mm per annum. In comparison, the average yearly rainfall in Edinburgh was measured at 676.2mm over the same time period (Met. Office n.d.). A fairly high rainfall should dictate that houses be watertight, particularly in the roof – any openings such as windows or smoke-holes would run the risk of letting in the rain. Rain and high winds combined provide a more difficult problem in that the rain will not always be falling vertically but will often be blown horizontally. Summer days are long in Lewis, due to the high latitude, and there is a yearly average of 1216.8 hours of sunshine. However the average sunshine over the thirty year period was lower than that of Edinburgh, which measured 1405.8 hours (ibid.).

The climate and geography of Lewis also affect agricultural practices on the island. Crop growing on Lewis is difficult due to the nature of the poor, stony soil, while ample grazing land makes the island more suitable for the rearing of cattle and sheep. There were a number of years, most notably during the nineteenth century, where crops failed due to adverse weather conditions (MacDonald 1990: 125-29). In many areas there is no good natural harbour to fish out of, particularly in winter when high winds can make fishing dangerous (Geddes 1955: 45).

In 1755, the population of Lewis was 6,386 (Darling 1955: 81). This had risen to 9,168 by 1801 and continued to rise to 19,694 in 1851, 25,421 in 1881, 28,760 in 1901, and reached its peak in 1911 at 29,532 (ibid.: 81). The population then fell to 25,079 in 1931, and to 23,595 in 1951 (ibid.: 81). By 1971, the population had fallen to 20,326, and in 2001 there were 18,489 persons resident in Lewis (CNES n.d.).[10]

[10] It should be noted that the census figures for the years 1981 to 2001 indicate the number of 'persons resident' rather than the number of 'persons present' as indicated by the previous census returns.



Map 3: The distribution of vegetation on Lewis and Harris (Geddes 1955: 50)[11]

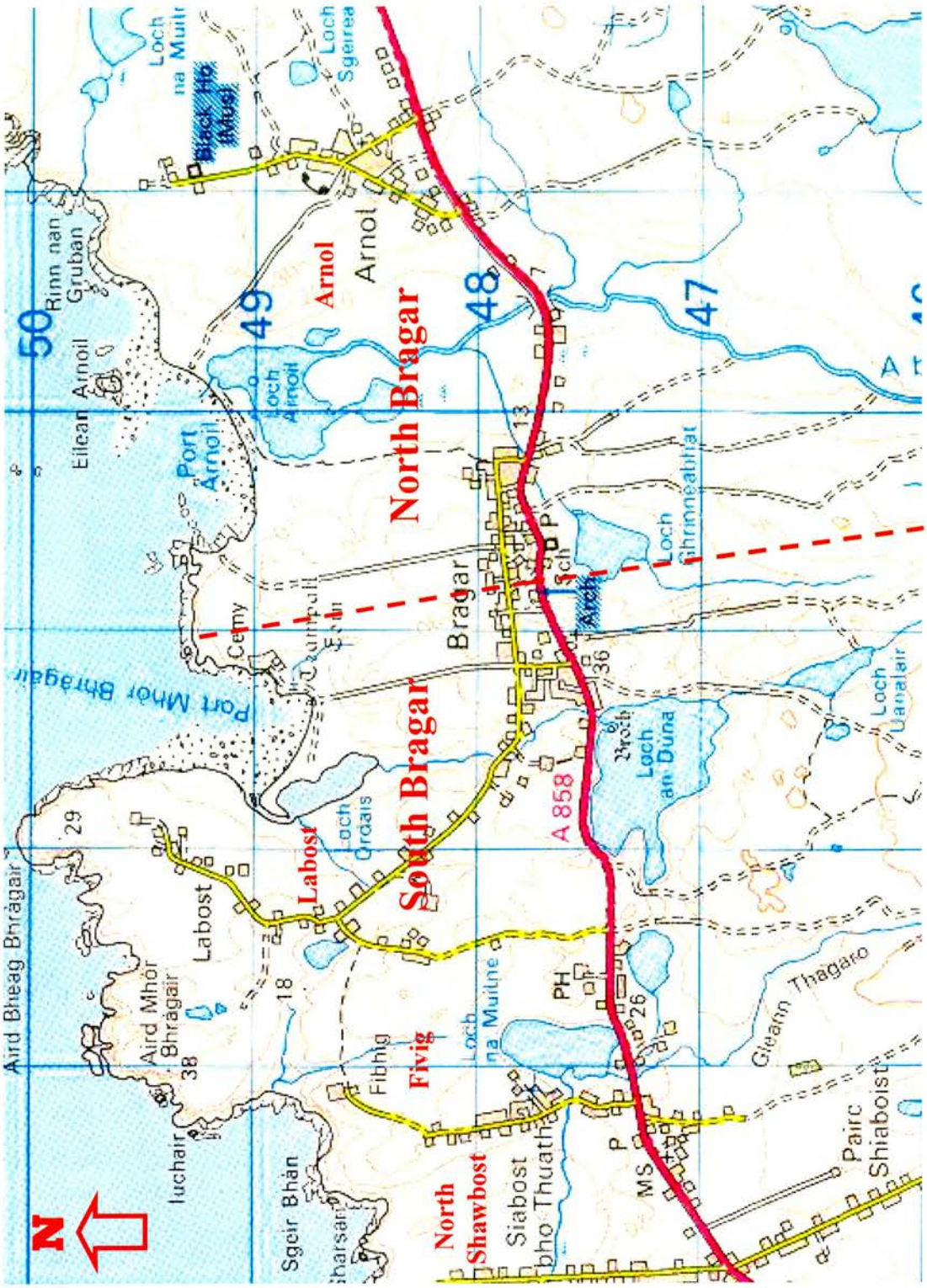
[11] Reproduced courtesy of Edinburgh University Press.

2.3 The Township of Bragar

The township of Bragar is situated on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis, roughly half-way between Barvas to the north and Carloway to the south, in an area known as the West Side, in Gaelic *An Taobh Siar* (Map 2). The West Side, and indeed Bragar, was chosen as the focus of this study due to the number and the condition of the ruins in the area, and their accessibility. This side of the island has arguably undergone less change than many, if not most, of the east coast areas, possibly due to its distance from Stornoway (some fifteen miles across the island), and indeed from the mainland.

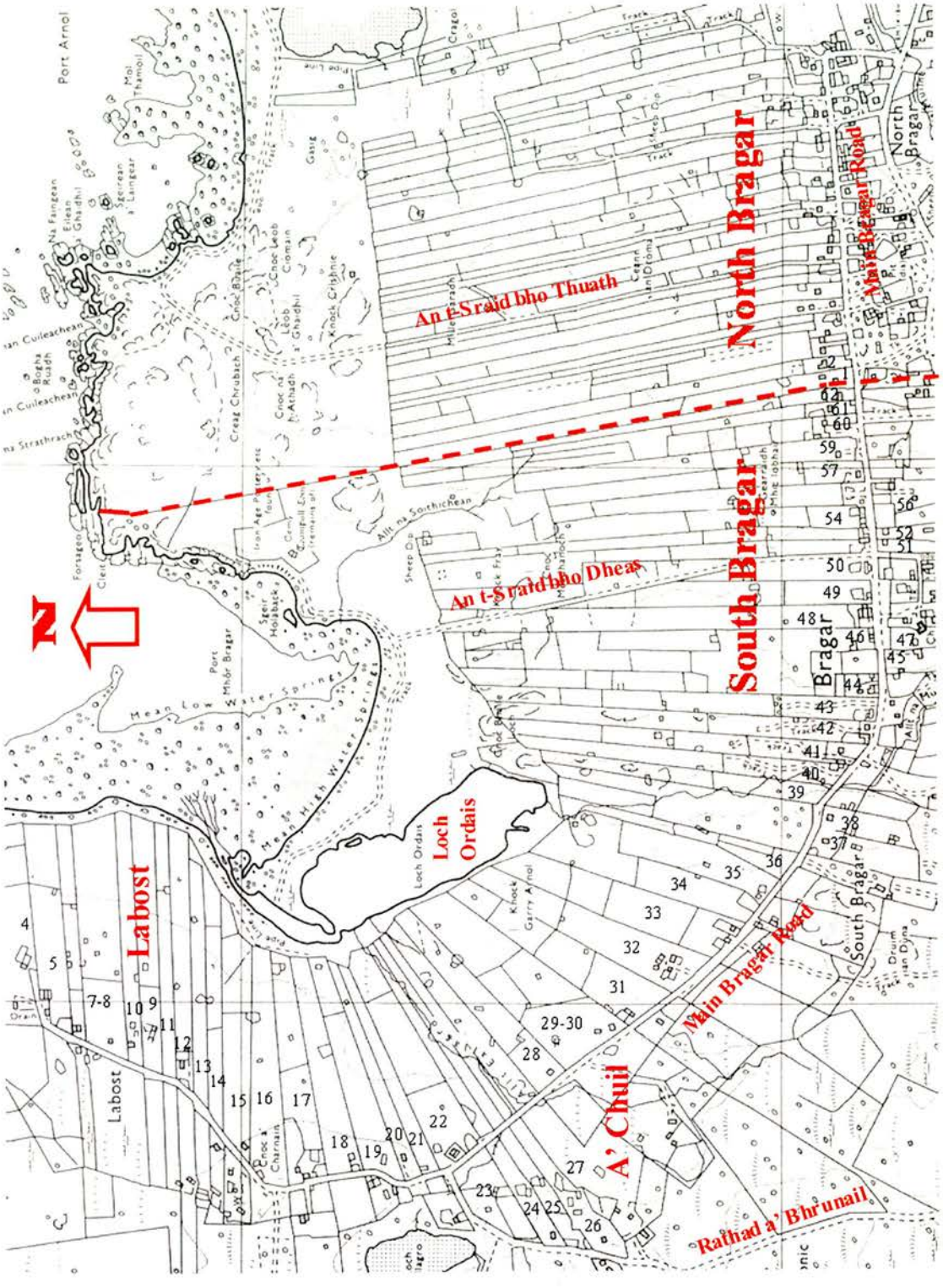
Bragar is comprised of North and South Bragar (Map 4), and it is likely that this division has been in place since at least the early eighteenth century: the Rental for 1718 shows that the township of 'Bragir' (spelt 'Bragyar' elsewhere in the document) was held in two tacks[12] (Brand 1902) by brothers John and Malcolm MacAulay (Thomas 1880: 420). The main Bragar road runs east-west through the township, parallel to the main West Side road, the A858. Two roads run north-south perpendicular to the main Bragar road, from the township towards the sea (Map 5). One is in North Bragar, the other in South Bragar. Both roads are known locally as *An t-Sràid* (The Street) (Inf. A). The road in North Bragar will henceforth be referred to as *An t-Sràid bho Thuath* (North Street) and the road in South Bragar as *An t-Sràidd bho Dheas* (South Street).

[12] A tack is a lease or a tenancy of a plot of land.



Map 4: North and South Bragar (1997)[13]

[13] Not to Scale. Original scale 1:10, 000. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright NC/02/24585.



Map 5: North and South Bragar (1974)[14] showing the position of the lots

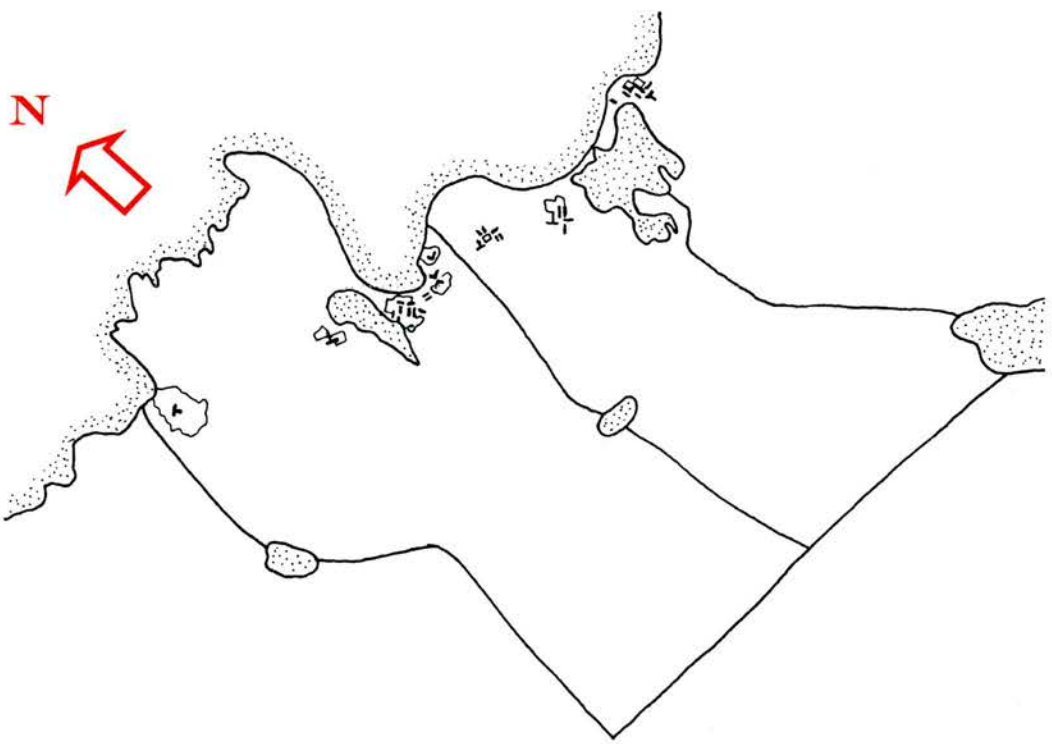
[14] Not to scale. Original Scale 1:10,000. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright NC/02/24585.

The early nineteenth century settlements in Bragar were small clusters of houses situated around the shore and around the two sea lochs, Loch Ordais, and Loch Arnol (Map 6 and Map 7). Gibbs' map, a reduction of the 1807-09 map by Chapman, shows a number of small settlements along the shore from Loch Ordais to the boundary with North Bragar, and a settlement just to the west of Loch Ordais. In North Bragar there is a settlement slightly further back from the shore, close to the boundary with South Bragar, and another to the west of Loch Arnol. At this time, the land was held in a system called 'runrig', whereby a group of, on average, four or five tenants worked an area of land together. Arable land was rotated, so that no family held the same piece of land for more than a few years running; each had a share of the best and worst land equally. This system of farming will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

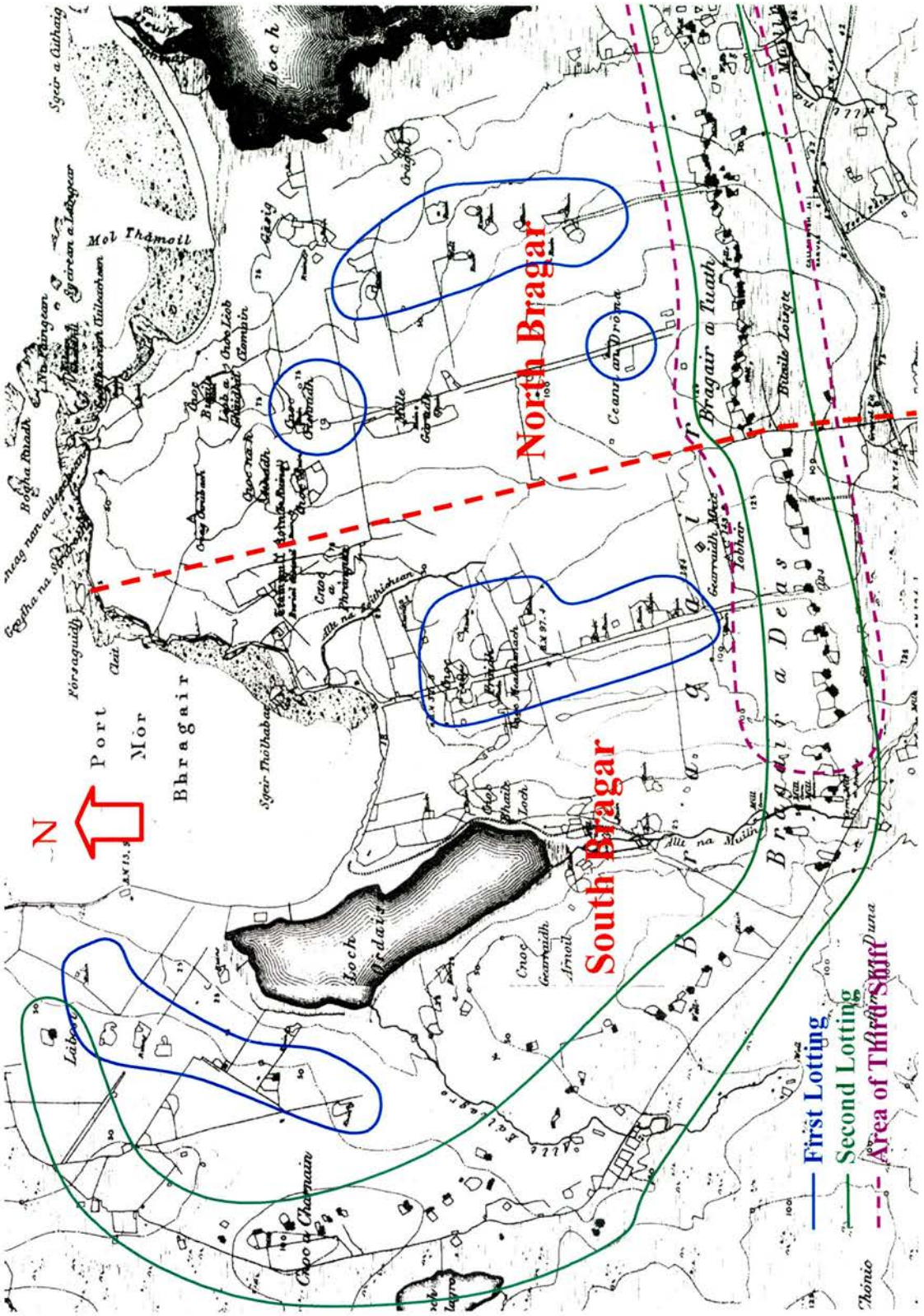
In the late eighteenth century, Francis Humberston MacKenzie, the last Lord Seaforth, began to re-distribute the land. He broke up the runrig system of farming and allocated each tenant his own plot of land, which he would farm, and on which he would build his house. These plots of land are known in Lewis as 'lots'; elsewhere they are more commonly known as crofts.

It is likely that this first lotting took place in Bragar in the early nineteenth century, possibly around 1820, and this is discussed further in Chapter 5. It seems that MacKenzie envisioned the new lots running east-west, parallel to the coast, and the houses of this first lotting are to be seen along *An t-Sràid bho Thuath*, *An t-Sràid bho Dheas*, and another road slightly further east. The remains of these settlements can be seen on the first Ordnance Survey (OS) map (1853), surveyed between 1849 and 1852 (Map 8). On this map, these houses are shown as ruins, and stone wall footings from this first lotting can still been seen today in some areas, running parallel to the main Bragar road (cf. Dodgshon 1993b : 389-91).

Map 6: Gibbs' 1817 reduction of Chapman's 1807-09 map of Lewis
(from a photographic copy in the Map Library, National Library of Scotland)

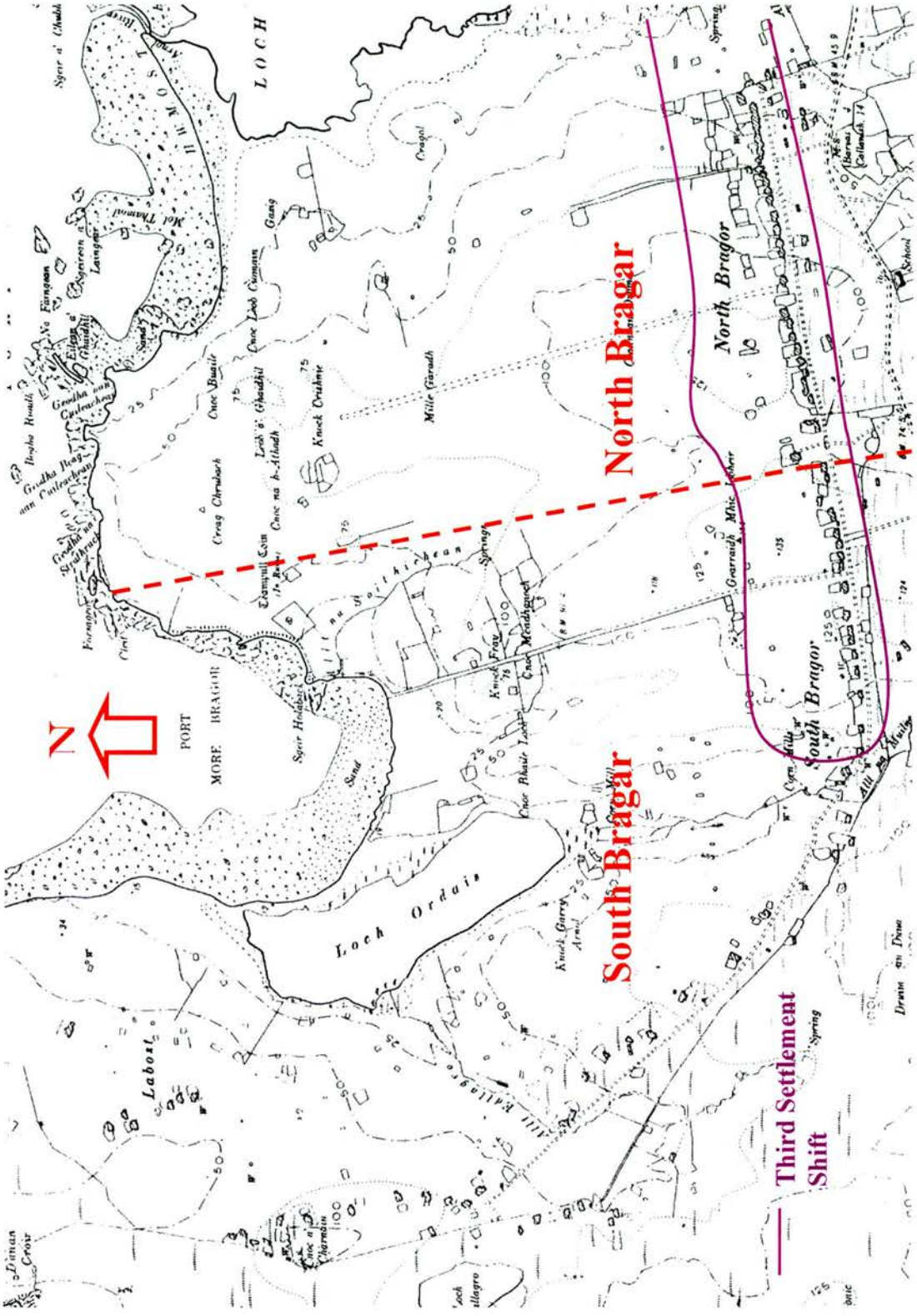


Map 7: Early nineteenth century settlements in Bragar, based on Gibbs' map.



Map 8: North and South Bragar (1853)[15] showing the houses of the first and second lottings and the area of the third settlement shift

[15] Ordnance Survey map. Copyright expired. Not to scale. Original scale 1:10,560.



Map 9: North and South Bragar (1898)[16] showing the third settlement shift

[16] Ordnance Survey map. Copyright expired. Not to scale. Original Scale 1:10,560.

The second lotting took place shortly after James Matheson became owner of the island in 1844. It was his decision that the lots should run perpendicular to the coast, with each lot running north-south, the houses being at the south, or top end of the lot, the sea being to the north. This new layout is clearly visible on the first OS map (Map 8). This is the layout of the present lots although it seems that there was at least one additional shift in the nineteenth century, not of the settlement as such, but of the position of some of the houses. Simply put, it seems as if all of the houses in North Bragar, and many of the houses in South Bragar, were moved forward, or southward, by 20-100m. This can be seen when comparing the first OS map (Map 8), and the six-inch OS map from 1898, which was surveyed in 1895 (Map 9).

This shift in housing may have coincided with the construction of the main Bragar road, clearly visible on the 1898 map. The present day Bragar road sits along what was, in 1853, the northern edge of the township's common grazing land. In North Bragar, the houses of the second lotting follow the north edge of the common grazing which lay to the south of the township. However, comparing the 1853 and the 1898 maps of North Bragar it appears that roughly 100m of common grazing was removed from the north end of the common grazing to make way for the new road, and by 1895, the houses had been moved forward in line with the road. On the 1853 map, where South Bragar met North Bragar, the northern edge of the common grazing was not continuous. In South Bragar, the northern edge of the common grazing was approximately 200m further south than in North Bragar. The houses of the second lotting in South Bragar were positioned, not directly along the northern edge of the common grazing as they were in North Bragar, but 50-100m to the north of it. The present-day Bragar road, in place by 1895 was positioned some 100m to the south of the North Bragar houses (cutting into the common grazing) and roughly 20-30m to the south of the houses in South Bragar. Possible reasons for the third settlement shift will be discussed in Chapter 6. At this time (1895) the road only extended as far west as lot 21, leaving the area of Labost still without a road (compare Map 5 and Map 9). At some point after 1895 the road was extended into Labost and *Rathad a' Bhrunail* (Brunal Road) was constructed, running north-south from the main Bragar road to the main West Side road. This may well have occurred in 1896-97 when

money became available for the construction of new roads under the Western Highlands and Islands Works Act, 1891 (Brand 1902: xlvii).

2.4 Sources

2.4.1 The Physical Evidence

In order to gain an idea of how the size and layout of the houses had changed from the pre-lotting houses to those of the first and second lottings, and those that were built after the second lotting, I decided to conduct a study of the physical remains of houses in the Bragar township, spanning this time period. Today, South Bragar consists of sixty-two lots, each running north-south, perpendicular to the main Bragar road, from the road towards the sea, and North Bragar consists of around forty-six similar lots. Most of the lots contain one or more ruined houses. Due to the time constraints of the thesis and the number of ruined houses in the township it was decided that the fieldwork should focus primarily on either North or South Bragar. South Bragar was chosen due to the number and quality of its ruins.

The first three lots in South Bragar are situated in Fivig, which can be reached today, by road, from Shawbost (Map 4). Only one of the old houses is still standing in this area. At the west end of South Bragar is an area called Labost, which extends eastwards from lot 4, as far as lot 18 or 19, although there is no definitive boundary (Inf. B). Lots 20, 21 and 22 are also situated on the main Bragar road, with lots 23 to 27 being situated on *Rathad A' Bhrunail*. This area, in which lots 23 to 27 are situated, is known locally as *A' Chùil* (The Corner). Lots 28 to 62 are also situated on the main Bragar road (Map 5).

The mid-to-late nineteenth century houses mostly stand on the preset lots and are often situated beside, or behind, the modern houses, which are generally close to the road. In some cases, however, the modern houses have been built on the opposite side of the road to the older houses. The early nineteenth century houses are generally situated around the coast and around Loch Ordais, while the houses of the first lotting are generally situated on either side of *An t-Sràid bho Dheas*.

It was decided that a full analysis of every ruined house in South Bragar, was beyond the scope of this thesis and not necessary to gain a picture of housing change from the physical evidence. Instead, I decided to look closely at a smaller number of houses – forty-one in total – which best illustrate some of the changes that occurred over the period in question. These forty-one houses were chosen after spending many hours looking at houses in South and North Bragar. Possible sites in which houses spanning a variety of time-periods might be found were identified by a study of the 1853 OS map and of aerial photographs of the area, taken in 1950 (Figure 1). I then conducted a walk-over survey of most of South Bragar and the coastal area of North Bragar and selected a number of houses that I thought worthy of investigation. Some houses were chosen for their particular features, some for their simplicity, others for their clarity of plan, or for their age, and some because they formed part of a series of houses built on one lot. A number of houses were chosen because the owner was still living locally and was able to tell me about the house. In particular, all the ruins in the Labost area were surveyed, partly for the above reasons, and also because they had formed a community in their own right and I was keen to trace the development of houses within such an area.[17]

After two initial trips to Lewis in April and November 2000, fieldwork was carried out during four further trips between April 2002 and July 2004. The houses surveyed were photographed and recorded on video tape, and were measured, by myself, using an ordinary tape measure, with a view to completing a plan to scale of each building. Any unusual features were noted. The plans were drawn up and annotated at 1:100 and were then reduced to 1:250 (a scale commonly used by RCAHMS) for inclusion in the thesis.[18] In addition, the plans were further reduced to a scale of 1:1250 in order that all forty-one house plans might be viewed on a single sheet of A3 paper to

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[17] I am indebted to Dr. Finlay MacLeod for directing me to a number of specific house sites in South Bragar, and to a number of informants in the area and throughout the island.

[18] In September 2003 I attended a training day, organised by the Medieval or Later Rural Settlement Working Group (now the Historic Rural Settlement Trust), at Ben Lawers in Tayside. The course was led by staff from RCAHMS, the National Trust for Scotland, and Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division. The first half of the day was spent learning how to conduct a plane table survey of a ruined farmstead. The second half was spent conducting a walk-over survey of the surrounding area where we discussed site identification and interpretation, and site mapping and measuring. We were also provided with information on the production of site records at RCAHMS, including the different scales used in the production of site plans.

aid in the comparison of house plans over time. All plans have been drawn freehand to reflect the uneven nature of the buildings, which were not built with geometric precision.

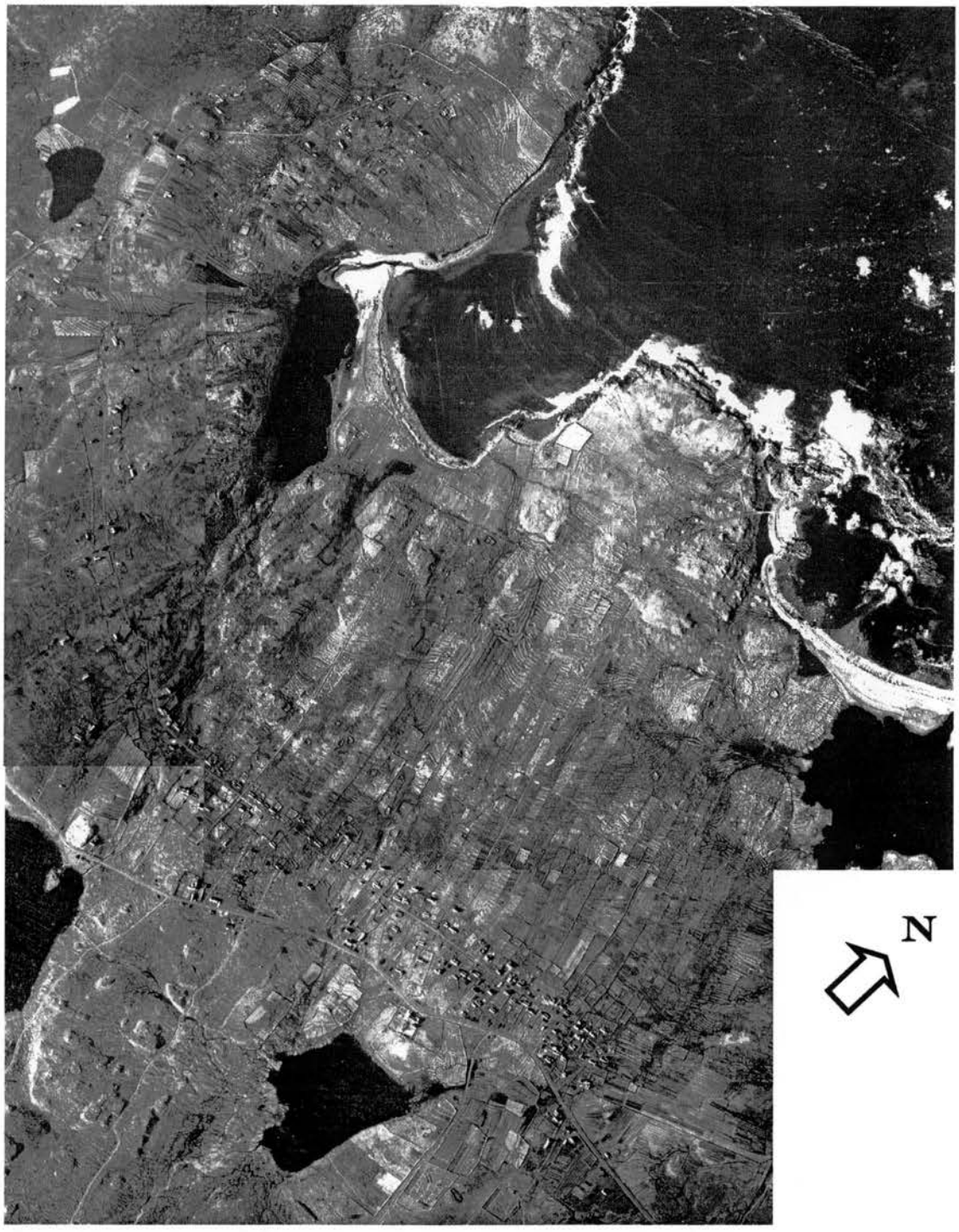


Figure 1: Aerial photographs of North and South Bragar (1950)
(Photographs, nos. 3052, 3053, 4051, and 4053, reproduced courtesy of RCAHMS)

Thirty-six of the forty-one houses recorded were in South Bragar. Thirty-three of these fell between lot 4 in the west to lot 50 in the east, including every house between lots 4 and 21. Three were situated along *An t-Sràid bho Dheas*. All dated from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The remaining five ruins recorded were in North Bragar. The houses in North Bragar were chosen because of their age - at least three of them are pre-lotting, the other two are probably of the first lotting but may, in fact, also be pre-lotting. Two of the pre-lotting houses are from the remains of a township called Gàsig, situated beside Loch Arnol, the name of which is still recognised in the township today due to the prolonged grazing of sheep in the area (Inf. C). The other three in North Bragar are situated along *An t-Sràid bho Thuath.* Although the focus of the fieldwork is on South Bragar, there are very few houses in this area that are likely to be pre-lotting, or belong to the first phase of lotting, and it is therefore useful to look also to North Bragar for evidence of this kind.

The houses surveyed were in varying degrees of ruin, and a number of them proved difficult to measure. In some cases this was due to overgrown vegetation, but very often the line of the original walls had been obscured by falling rubble. In a number of cases, after the buildings had been abandoned as houses they continued their lives as byres, sheep pens, or sheep dips. The buildings were often altered to accommodate these new uses and in some instances such alterations have made it difficult to determine the original ground plan. For this reason, plans show the buildings as they stood when measured, including any additional features added after the house was abandoned as a dwelling. Also, in a number of ruins, all that remained of some of the walls was a vague outline in the grass, thus making it difficult to ascertain the position of openings in the walls and, in some cases, the full extent of the building. In such cases, the original outline of the building has been identified where possible. Without more advanced measuring equipment or excavation, it is impossible to gain a more accurate plan of those buildings that are in a more ruinous condition. The plans do not show the condition of the buildings or differentiate between walls which are mostly intact and those which are mere outlines in the grass, as the purpose of the plans is to gauge the overall size, shape, and layout of the houses.

One of the houses in South Bragar (*Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh*) had already been surveyed and published, independently, by both Roussell (1934: 22) and MacLeòid (1960: 339), and two of the houses in North Bragar (Gásig (a) and Gásig (b)) had been surveyed and published by Banks and Atkinson (2000: 74). Having looked at the buildings in detail, and filmed them, I saw no need to measure them again myself. I have used Roussell's plan of *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh* as it portrays the existing ground plan more accurately than does MacLeòid's plan.

As well as examining the houses in Bragar, I also spent some time looking at ruined houses elsewhere in Lewis, particularly on the West Side and in Ness, in order to place the Bragar houses into context. None of these houses was measured but many were photographed. A number of houses contained features that could also be seen in the Bragar houses, while others contained features that were not commonly seen in Bragar. This was an important part of the fieldwork and served to show the diversity of building traditions throughout Lewis, as is evidenced in many written sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The diversity of building styles throughout Lewis will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

2.4.2 Analysis of the Physical Evidence

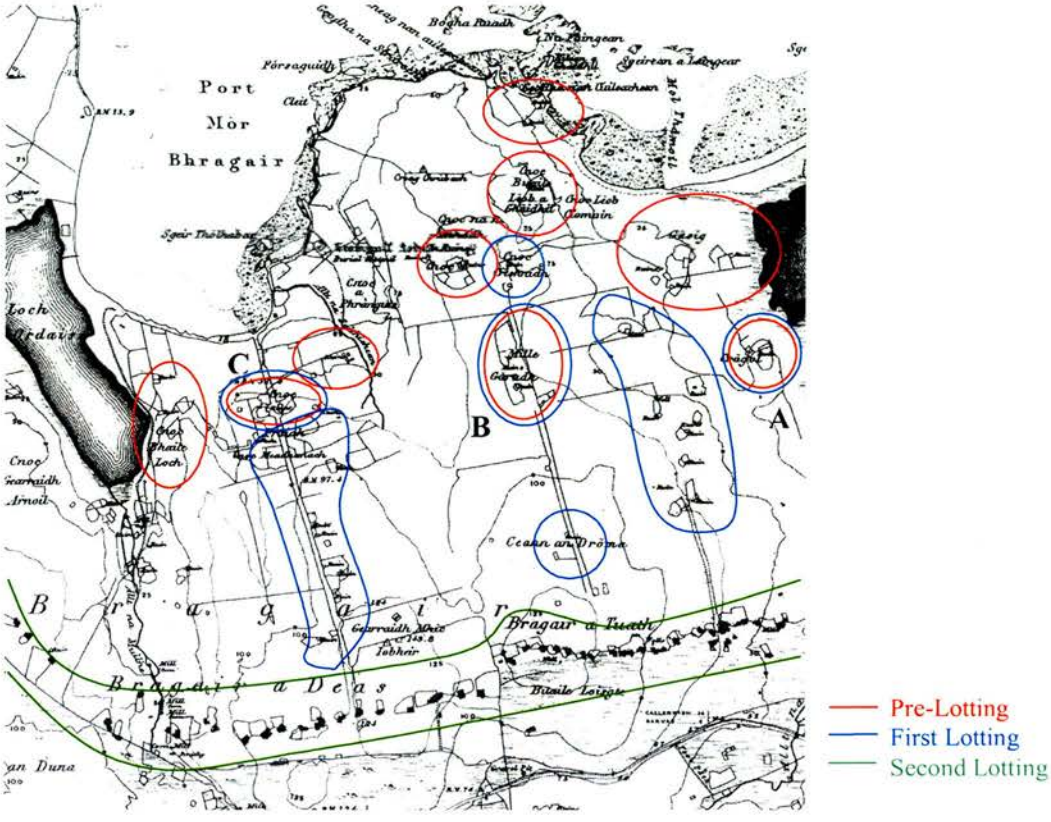
Having examined all forty-one buildings, and drawn up plans, the next step in analysing the data was to associate the building of each house, as closely as was possible, with a particular time frame. This would enable the houses to be grouped chronologically, so that analysis of the plans might show any changes in size, shape, or in the number or position of rooms or entrances, throughout the period in question. I thus endeavoured to identify each of the forty-one houses on the available nineteenth century maps, in order to determine when each house was built.

There were a number of difficulties with this system. The first Ordnance Survey map, published in 1853, shows the layout of the township after the second lotting. It shows, as ruins, any previously occupied buildings which include both the pre-lotting settlements, and the recently-abandoned buildings from the first lotting. Thus, in

using map evidence alone, there can be some dispute as to which ruins were pre-lotting and which belong to the first lotting. Ten of the buildings I surveyed were built before the second lotting. In order to determine which of these were pre-lotting I looked at their position in relation to the coast, to the sea lochs, Loch Arnol and Loch Ordais, and to the two roads, *An t- Sràid bho Dheas* and *An t-Sràid bho Thuath*, around which the first lotting seems to have been centred. Houses which were very close to the coast or the lochs, and some distance from the roads could be assumed to be pre-lotting. Houses which were further away from the coast and positioned along either of the roads could be assumed to be of the first lotting. However, there were a number of buildings which fell into both categories: they were both close to the roads and close to the coast (for example two of the houses situated along *An t-Sràid bho Thuath*). To determine which of these were of the first lotting it was necessary to look at the orientation of the houses. Those which stand east-west, along the gable ends, I have determined as belonging to the first lotting. Their gable ends face the road and a number of such houses can be seen along both roads. Those which do not stand east-west I have determined as belonging to the pre-lotting settlements although it is possible that the houses continued to be inhabited during the first lotting. Analysis of the plans of the pre-lotting and first-lotting houses shows that there was little, if any, difference in the size and layout of the two sets of houses, in which case the correct categorisation of these houses is not critical.

It should be mentioned here that in 1993, the geographer Robert A. Dodgshon published an article in which he examined the settlement layout in Bragar. He determined three 'systems of settlement': the pre-lotting, the first lotting, and the second lotting. In one diagram (see Map 10) Dodgshon identified three sites (which I shall identify as A, B, and C) as falling into both the pre-lotting and the first lotting systems (Dodgshon 1993a: 426-27). Although Dodgshon does not discuss this in his paper, or an any future paper, the implication is that some pre-lotting house sites were suitably situated as to remain occupied after the first lotting had taken place. It is certainly possible that one or some of the houses at sites B and C continued to be occupied after the first lotting, due to their situation close to the two roads. However

I do not believe there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the houses at site A were occupied after the first-lotting, particularly as they are not situated close to any road.

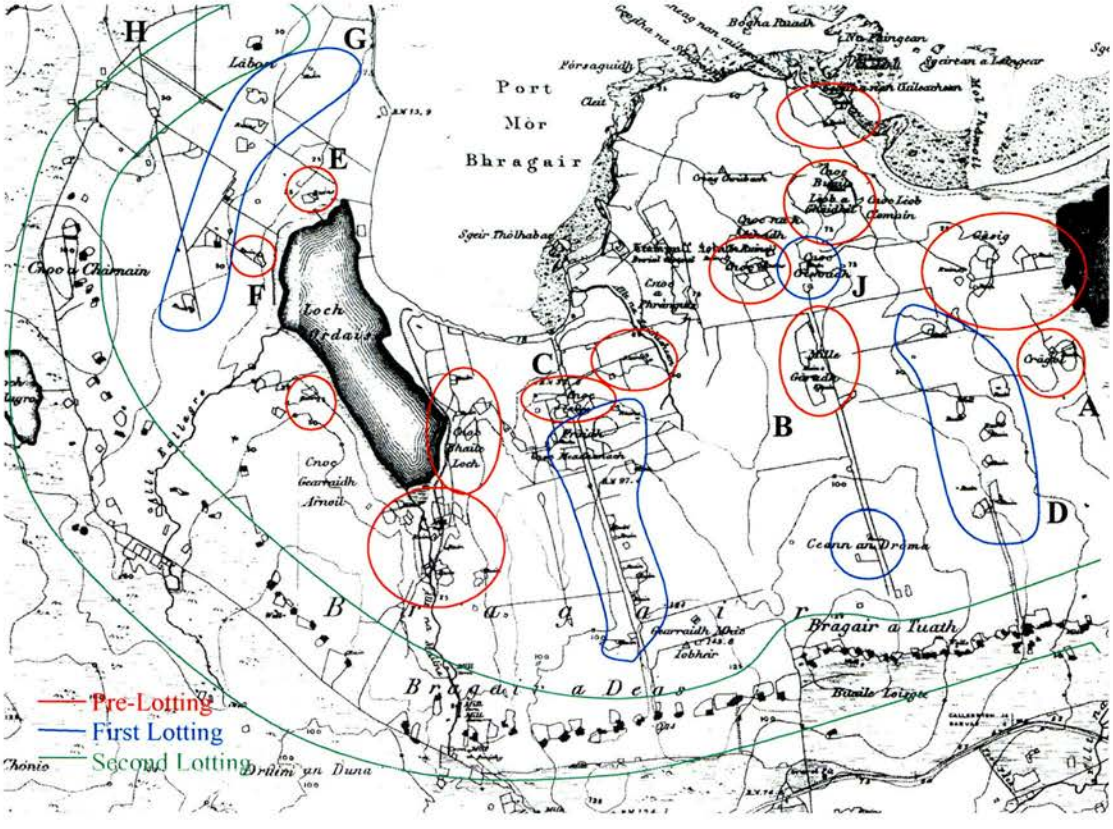


Map 10: Distribution of the pre-lotting settlements and the settlements of the first and second lotting (after Dodgshon 1993a: 426)[19]

My concern is with the time-periods in which the houses were built, rather than occupied, and I therefore suggest Map 11 represents a more appropriate representation, for the purpose of this thesis, of the settlement patterns in Bragar. Very few remains can be seen at sites B, E, and F which makes it difficult to determine whether they belonged to the pre-lotting period or to the first-lotting. I believe it is likely, however, that all three sites belong to the pre-lotting settlement. Sites E and F are situated close to Loch Ordais and I suggest that the settlement moved to site G during the first lotting, and to site H at some point during or after the second lotting. It is therefore likely that sites E and F represent the pre-lotting settlement in this area. Site B is more difficult to determine, although the uneven nature of the walls surrounding the site and the fact that the site is named (*Mille*

[19] Ordnance Survey map (1853). Copyright expired. Not to scale. Original Scale 1:10,560.

Gàradh) perhaps suggest that it was occupied, at least originally, during the pre-lotting period. The houses shown in site D are likely to be of the first lotting as they are arranged in a somewhat linear fashion along what may, at that time, have been a rough path, the southern end of which is shown on the 1853 map. I did not look in any detail at this area during the course of my fieldwork and evidence provided by aerial photographs suggests that only one ruin survived in any detail in the area. The houses at J (those houses on *An t-Sràid bho Thuath*), may have been pre-lotting, however their orientation suggests that they more likely belonged to the first lotting.



Map 11: Alternative distribution of the pre-lotting settlements and the settlements of the first and second lotting[20]

Having identified each house and associated it with a particular time period according to map and field evidence, the next step was to construct a framework in which the houses of each period could be placed. I determined to do this by constructing a series of time-frames, or 'phases'. Five phases were thus determined

[20] Ordnance Survey map (1853). Copyright expired. Not to scale. Original Scale 1:10,560.

that incorporated the first lotting of the island, which took place in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, and the second lotting of the island which took place between 1848 and 1852 (Table 1). All the phases were determined using the available map evidence, particularly in relation to the 1853 1:10,560 OS map, the 1:2,500 OS map published in 1897, and the 1:10,560 version published in 1898.

Table 1: Table of Phases

Phase	Date	No. Houses
Phase 1	Pre-lotting	6
Phase 2	Of the 1st lotting (early 19th c.)	4
Phase 3	Of the 2nd lotting (1848-1852)	8
Phase 4	Post-2nd lotting, pre-1895 (1851-1895)	19
Phase 5	Post-1895	4

Phase 1 consists of those houses that were built before the first lotting and are situated close to the sea and the sea lochs. They are probably eighteenth century in origin although without excavation it is impossible to date them more accurately. Six of the houses surveyed fall into this category. They are shown as ruins on the 1853 map (Map 12).

The Phase 2 houses are those built for the first lotting, in the early nineteenth century. Four houses fall into this category, two being situated close to *An t-Sràid bho Dheas* in South Bragar, the other two being situated along *An t-Sràid bho Thuath* in North Bragar. These houses are also shown as ruins on the 1853 map (Map 12).

The houses in Phase 3 were built for the second lotting, which occurred sometime between 1848 and 1852, during which time the whole island was re-lotted and re-rented (Napier 1884). These houses are shown in black on the 1853 map and are situated in a rough line, slightly to the north of the present Bragar road. Eight of the houses surveyed fall into Phase 3 (Map 12).

Phase 4 comprises those houses that were built between 1853 and 1895. They do not appear on the 1853 map, but they do appear on the 1897 map. By far the largest number of houses surveyed – nineteen – fall into this category. A number of these houses may have been built when the present road was constructed. The two houses shown on the 1853 map on lots 21 and 50, for example, do not appear at all on the 1897 map, however, the houses that *are* shown on these lots on the 1897 map appear 20-30m in front of the houses shown on the 1853 map. In other words, it appears as if the 1853 houses have been moved forwards by 20-30m. On lot 49, in particular, the Phase 4 house is shown on the 1897 map, with the remains of the earlier, Phase 3, house behind it. It is thus likely that the shift of all three houses occurred either during or shortly after the building of the main Bragar road. However, not all of the houses in Phase 4 would necessarily have been constructed at the time the road was built. The rest of the houses in this phase either appear to be completely new houses on the 1897 map – in other words, no houses appear on the 1853 map in the same vicinity – or the houses on the 1897 map are not particularly close to the new road and therefore could not be said to have been positioned with the new road in mind (Map 13).

Phase 5 consists of houses that do not appear on the 1897 map and thus can be said to be post-1895. There are four houses in this phase. The newer house on lot 26 dates from around 1913 according to the owner (Inf. D). The dates of the other three are uncertain (Map 14).

Figure 2 shows the forty-one Bragar house-plans, arranged in Phases 1 to 5, at the scale of 1:1250. Plans at a scale of 1:250 are presented in Appendix 3. The houses in Phases 3, 4, and 5 have all been given a number corresponding to the lot on which they stand today. Where more than one house was built on the same lot, these have been awarded the same number and followed with (a), (b), or (c). As the Phase 1 and 2 houses have no associated lot number, it has been necessary to name them. Some of these are names by which the buildings are known in the township today,[21] others

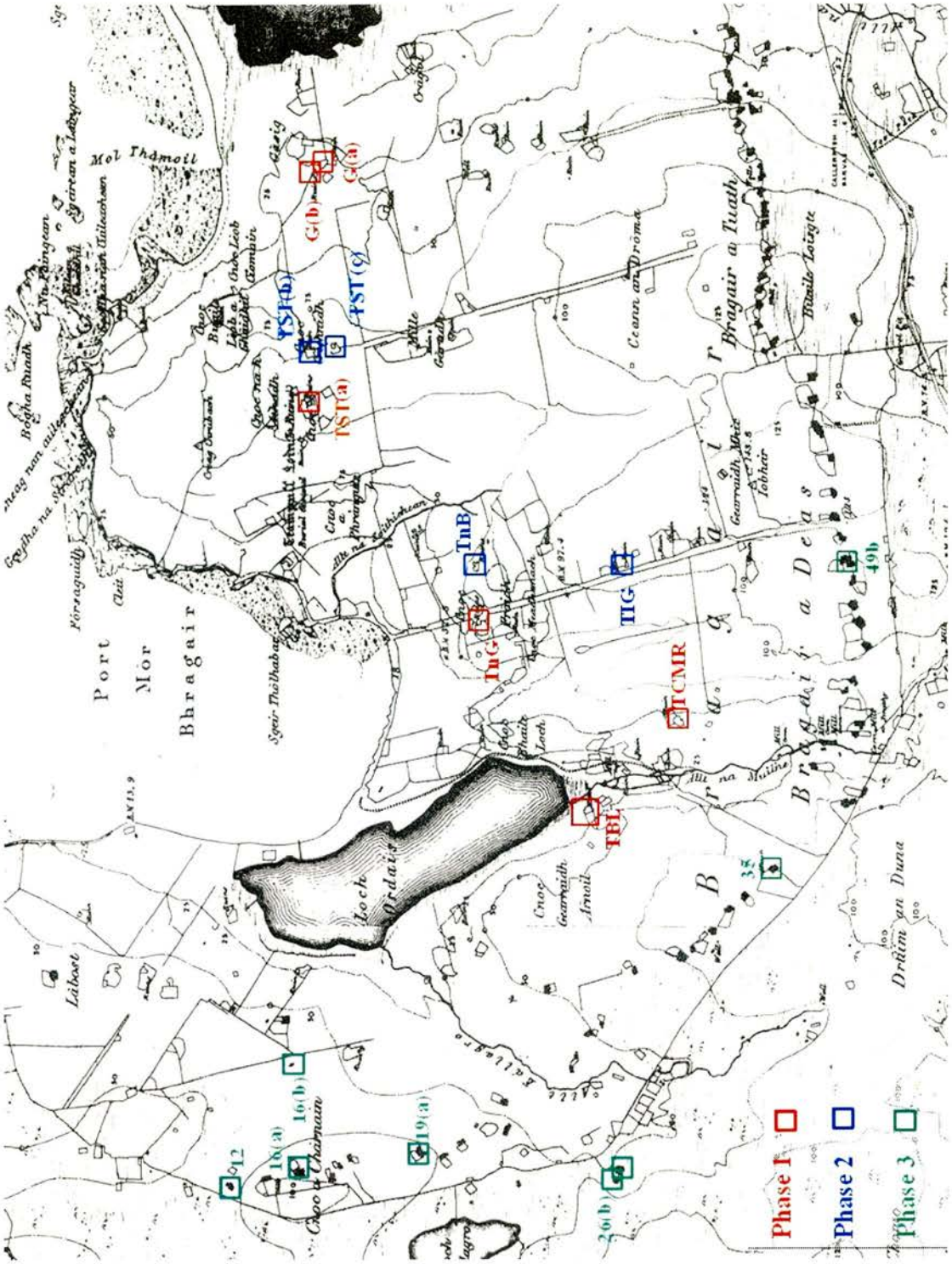
[21] *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh* [TCMR] (Kenneth Son of Rory's House) was so named in MacLeòid's 1960 article in *Gairm*. *Taigh nan Gobhaichean* [TNG] (The Smiths' House), *Taigh Iain*

I named myself based on their location.[22] Beside these names, an abbreviated name, as used on the maps, is given in squared brackets.

Having surveyed the houses, drawn up the plans, and arranged them into five time phases, it is now possible to compare the plans of houses built in each of the five phases, spanning a period of around a hundred years from pre-lotting to post-1895. Two things need to be taken into consideration, however, when comparing the plans. Firstly, some of the houses will have undergone changes, in layout and possibly in size, since they were first built. In addition, not all of the houses surveyed were complete and thus it is not always easy to identify the different parts of the house and to compare all of the houses across the five phases. Secondly, the sample of houses from some of the time phases (particularly Phases 1, 2, and 5) are so small as to render any absolute conclusions about the houses in these time periods impossible. However, I believe that, as long as these reservations are kept in consideration, this is the most useful and effective way to gauge the development of the houses over time. Conclusions drawn from the analysis of house plans will be presented in Chapters 4, 6, and 7.

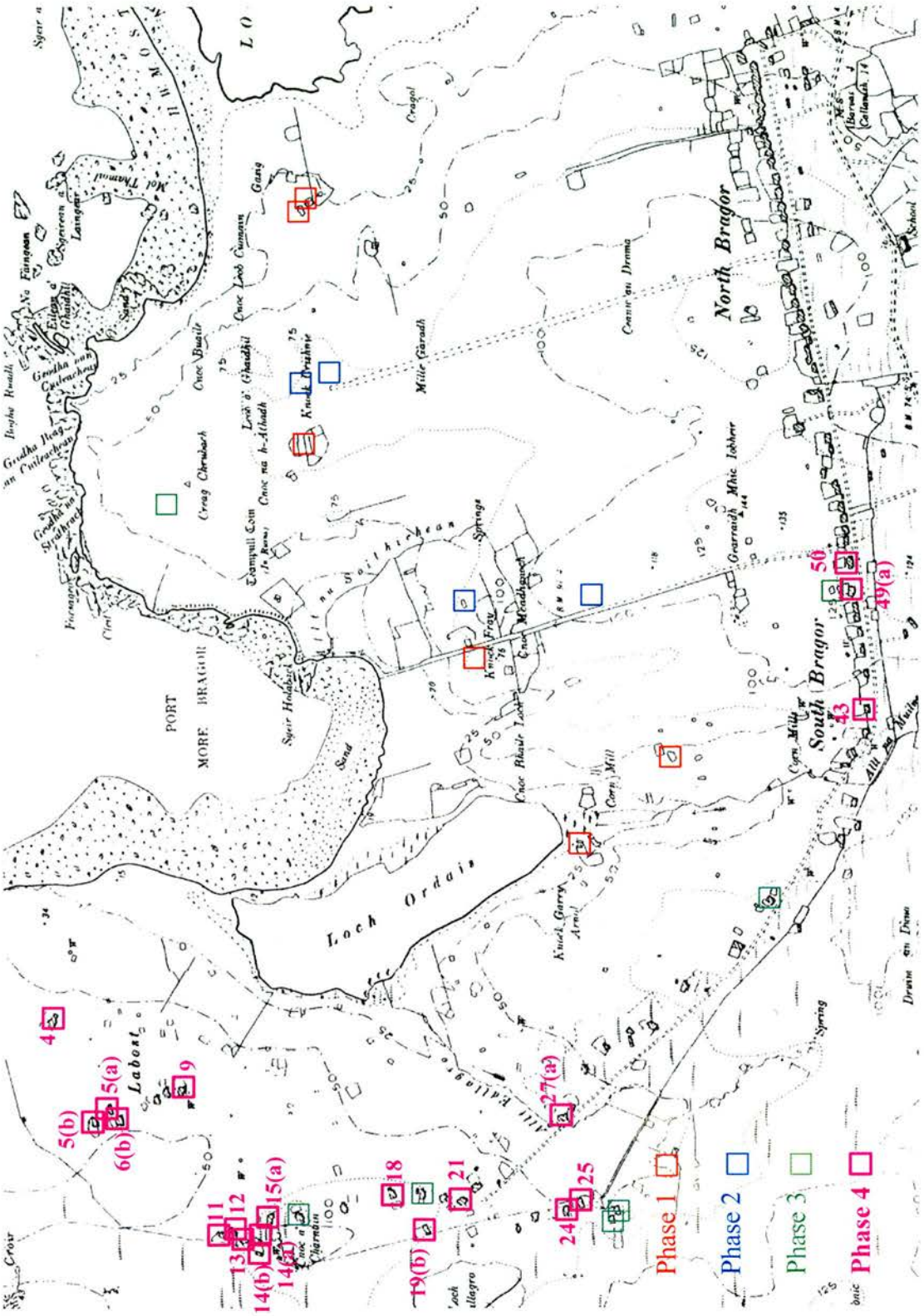
Gobha [TIG] (Ian Smith's House), and *Taigh na Banntraich* [TNB] (The Widow's House) were names given to me by an informant (Inf. A).

[22] I have named *Taigh Bhaile Loch* [TBL] (Loch Town House) after the settlement to the right of Loch Ordais under *Cnoc Bhaile Loch* (Loch Town Hill). The surveyed house is at the very head of Loch Ordais, between *Cnoc Baile Loch* and *Cnoc Gearraidh Arnoil* (Knock Garry Arnol). I have named Gàsig (a) and (b) [G(a) and G(b)] after the township or joint-farm to which they belonged. I have named *Taigh na Sràide bho Thuath* [TST] (North Street House) (a), (b), and (c) after the nearest road.



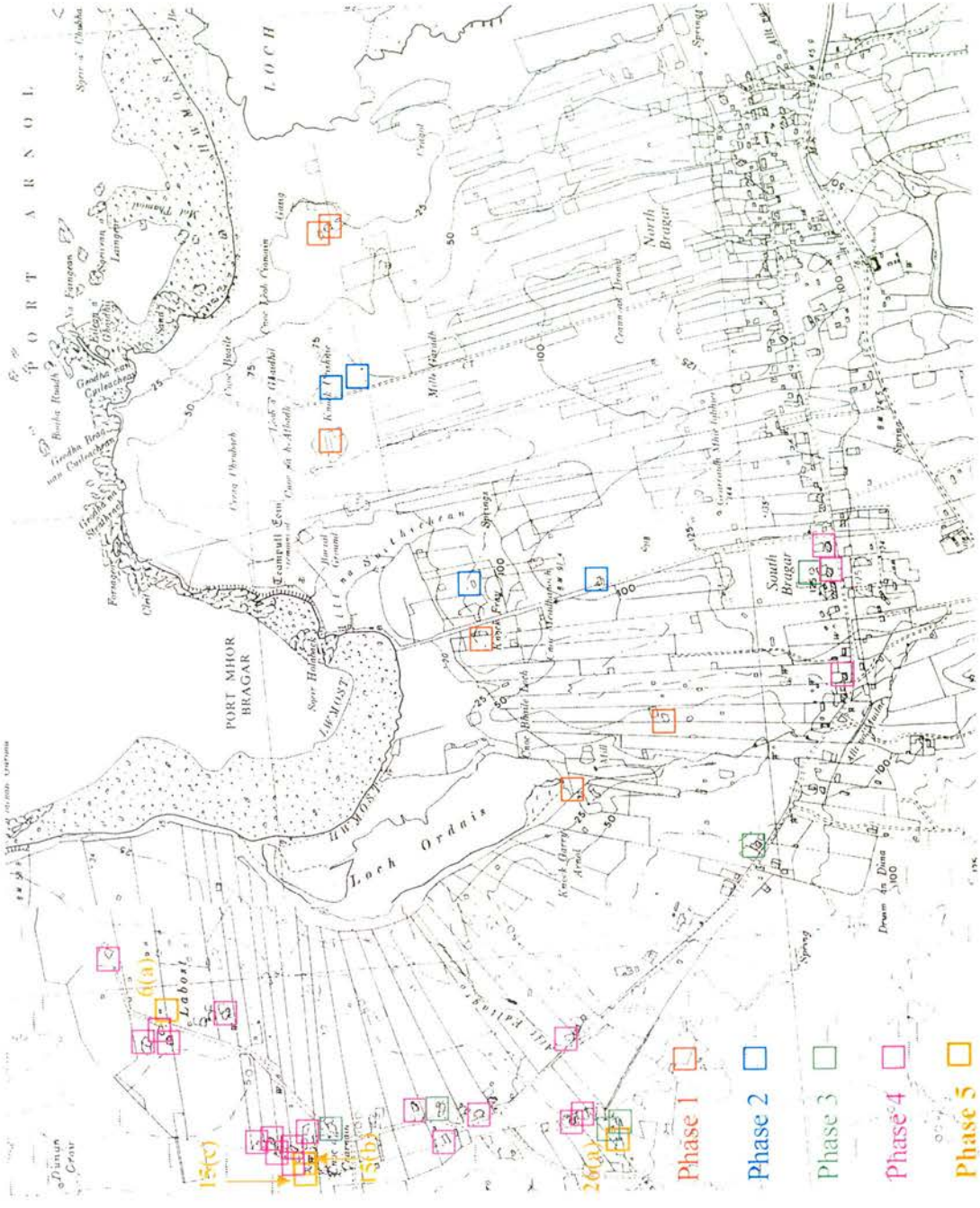
Map 12: Bragar (1853) showing the houses of Phases 1, 2, and 3[23]

[23] Ordnance Survey map. Copyright expired. Not to scale. Original scale 1:10,560.



Map 13: Bragar (1898) showing the houses of Phase 4[24]

[24] Ordnance Survey map. Copyright expired. Not to scale. Original scale 1:10,560.



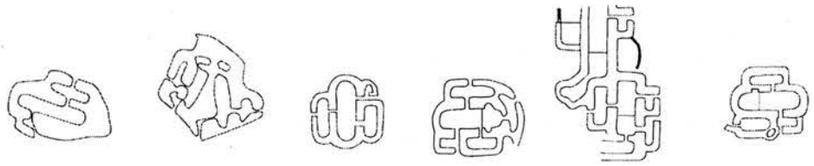
Map 14: Bragar (1965) showing the houses of Phase 5[25]

[25] Not to scale. Original scale 1:10,560. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright NC/02/24585.

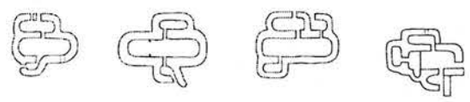
SCALE 1:1250

North

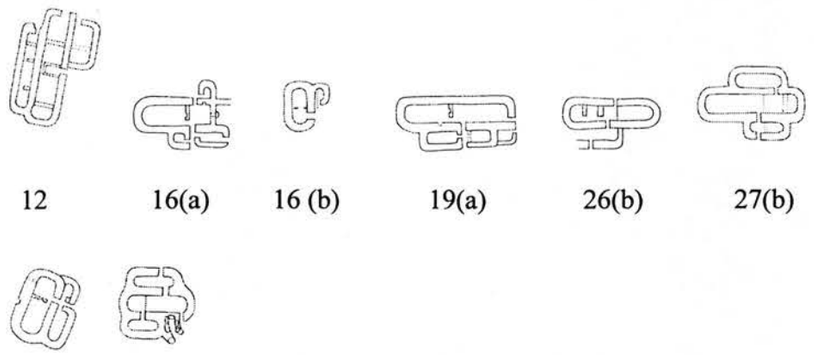
PHASES 1 – 5



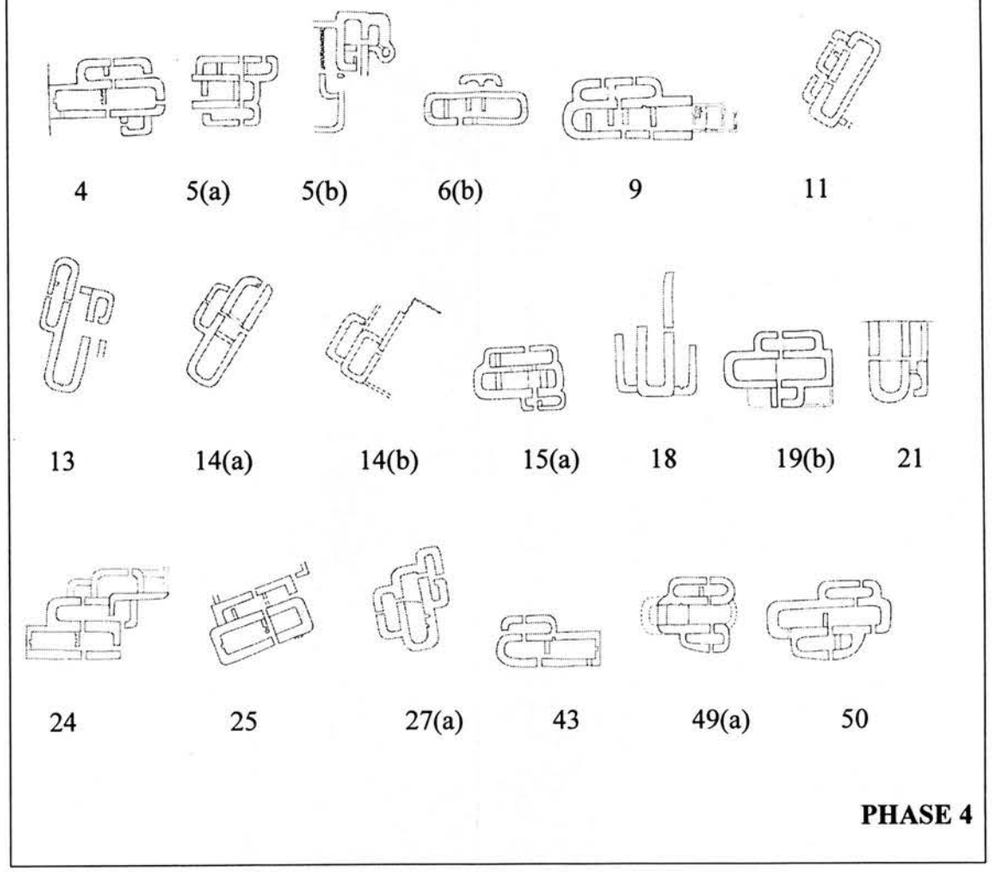
PHASE 1



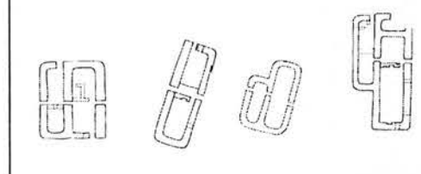
PHASE 2



PHASE 3



PHASE 4



PHASE 5

Figure 2: Bragar house plans (1:1250), Phases 1-5

2.4.3 Written Sources

There are a number of written sources which provide useful information about the history of Lewis, both its *genre de vie* and its housing, between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. Here I will discuss written sources dealing primarily with *genre de vie*; written sources dealing specifically with housing in Lewis will be dealt with in a separate section.

The published works come under a number of different headings, which may be described as follows. There is what I shall term first-hand information, which comes from the islanders themselves. There is also what I shall term second-hand information, which comes from visitors to the island who, although they saw, first-hand, the conditions of the islanders, clearly imbued their writings, to a greater or lesser degree, with their own prejudices and opinions about what they saw. In addition, there are a number of published reports and documents, unpublished papers, court and church records, rentals and census returns, and modern histories, all of which contribute in passing to the body of knowledge about Lewis.

Of the first-hand accounts, valuable information can be found cited in the reports of the Royal Commissioners from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The most important of these, perhaps, was the 1884 *Report* of the Royal Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cotters in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (led by Lord Napier and henceforth referred to as the Napier Commission), which led to the establishment of the Crofters Holding Act of 1886. In these reports, it is the 'Evidence' collected from Lewis and from other areas, rather than the report itself, that provides the most valuable, first-hand information about the conditions of the people at the time. With evidence given under conditions such as these, however, there is always the possibility of embellishment on the part of those giving the evidence although, for the most part, the evidence seems to give an accurate portrayal of life at the time. In the report of the Highlands and Islands Medical Service committee, published in 1912, first-hand evidence from the islanders themselves was again used and published (Dewar 1912). Amongst these first-hand accounts we can also include John Munro Mackenzie's *Diary 1851*, a

detailed twelve month diary of the life of the Lewis Chamberlain of the time. This does not appear to have been written for publication and may be presumed to be free from certain major sources of bias; it also seems to be an accurate account of life in Lewis at this time.

Second-hand reports can be found from travellers to the island, such as Martin Martin (1703) in the late seventeenth century, Johnson (1775) and Boswell (1785) in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and from the likes of W. Anderson Smith's *Lewsiana*, published in 1874 and again in 1886, and John Wilson's *Tales and Travels of a School Inspector*, published in 1928. It must be recognised, however, that writers such as these may have had certain agenda in publishing the account of their experiences in Lewis – for example they may have been writing for a specific audience and may thus have exaggerated or understated certain aspects of Lewis life – and also that they may have come from very different backgrounds and thus have different notions of good, bad, comfortable and sanitary, with regard to housing and to daily life. A number of official reports can also be included amongst these second-hand sources, such as Sir John McNeill's *Report to the Board of Supervision* in 1851, and the 1905 *Report to the Local Government Board for Scotland on the Sanitary Condition of the Lews* (Dittmar and Millar 1905). Both reports contain valuable information on the general condition of the people, and of their houses, at the time, although both were investigating specific aspects of life on Lewis and, to a large extent, had their own agendas. While the 1905 report focuses on the insanitary condition of the houses, the 1851 report focuses on the widespread poverty prevalent in the Highlands and Islands at the time, which the author believed could best be relieved by forced emigration.

Other, non-published, documents have also proved useful in this research. The Seaforth Muniments contain papers relating to the MacKenzies' estates in Lewis, in particular, two sets of Articles of Set for the Lewis estate, and two sets of Rules and Regulations for the Lewis estate from Matheson's time also exist. These papers provide us with information about the proprietors' attitude towards the Lewis people and their housing at different points of time throughout the late eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries. The census returns for South Bragar have also been useful in analysing population statistics at a household level.

Of the more modern accounts of the island, MacKenzie's *Book of the Lews* (1919), MacDonald's *Lewis, a History of the Island* (1990), Geddes' *The Isle of Lewis and Harris* (1955), and Thompson's *Harris and Lewis* (1968) have proved invaluable, with each book having its own strengths. MacKenzie focuses mainly on the history of the island, from pre-history to the Battle of Culloden in 1746. MacDonald's work looks both at the history of the island, and touches on all aspects of life on Lewis up until the early twentieth century, focusing mainly on the nineteenth century. As a native of the island, from Tolsta on the east coast, his history is embellished with local knowledge, much of which he obtained from his mother (Hugh Cheape pers. comm.). As a geographer, Geddes focuses on the physical and human geography of Lewis. His work is extremely detailed and covers most aspects of life on the island, focusing more closely than MacDonald does on Lewis during the first half of he twentieth century. Thompson's strength lies in his examination of communications, trade, and industry on the island during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Various other texts have proved useful, particularly when dealing with specific aspects of society. Of particular note is Calum Ferguson's *Children of the Black House* (2003) which looks at the changes that took place in Lewis during the late nineteenth and twentieth century through his mother's eyes. One of the strengths of this book is its portrayal of the local effects of both island-wide and world-wide phenomena, such as the two World Wars and the sinking of the Iolaire, within sight of Stornoway Harbour, on the morning of 1st January 1919.

2.4.4 Previous Research on Housing in Lewis and Further Afield

The earliest systematic description of the houses in Lewis comes from the publications of archaeologist and antiquarian, Captain F. W. L. Thomas, who conducted research on housing in the Outer Hebrides during the second half of the nineteenth century. His article in *PSAS*, 'On the Primitive Dwellings and Hypogea of the Outer Hebrides' (1867) was the first to provide any detailed information,

including drawings, of the vernacular houses on Lewis. Sir Arthur Mitchell (1880), Thomas's sometime companion during his visits to Lewis, also published a short article about the houses, as one of the transcripts of his lectures in his compilation, *The Past in the Present*. Both give accounts of houses that they saw in Lewis, giving general descriptions of 'typical' houses, and details from specific houses. Much information is to be gleaned from these plans and descriptions.

After Thomas and Mitchell, it was not until the 1930s that researchers began to take an interest in the vernacular housing of Lewis, and it was the Scandinavians who were to dominate this research for the next twenty years.

The most important of these was Aage Roussell, a Danish architect and archaeologist, who visited the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland in 1931 with a very specific purpose in mind (see Stummann Hansen 1998). He had obtained funding from the Carlsberg Foundation to study the links between building customs in Scotland and in Scandinavia. Such links had been virtually discounted in Scotland at the time: in 1928, The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland had published a *Report* where it was stated categorically that as the Norse had always build in wood, and as the houses in the Hebrides were stone-built, there could be no commonality between the stone-built houses of the Hebrides and the early Scandinavian houses (RCAHMCS 1928: xxiii). Archaeologists today, of course, would not accept such a theory. Roussell did not find any definitive links between the two building customs, although he found many similarities, and his subsequent publication, *Norse Building Customs in the Scottish Isles* (1934), contains a wealth of information about the housing in Lewis. He measured and drew up plans of a number of the houses he examined, some of which were occupied, and commented on their construction and layout.

Over the next few years, Lewis was to be visited by two Swedish ethnologists, Sven T. Kjellberg and Olof Hasslöf, in 1934, and by Danish archaeologist and human geographer, Gudmund Hatt, in 1936. The diary of Kjellberg and Hasslöf's visit has been published, in part, by Fenton (1998), although most of what is published deals

not with Lewis, but with Harris and Uist. Hatt was less convinced than Roussell of the relationship between the Scandinavian and Hebridean houses. Although most of his notes from Lewis remain unpublished, some of his observations and photographs have been published by Stummann Hansen (2000). In 1948 it was the turn of Swedish ethnologist Åke Campbell to visit the Hebrides. Campbell had already spent some time in Ireland studying houses and had published a number of articles about the Irish house (1935, 1937, 1938) before making his trip to the Hebrides. Although no article about his trip was published at the time, some of his field notes have, more recently, been published by Walker (1989a). Unfortunately, few of these notes relate to his trip to Lewis. In the latter part of the twentieth century Danish ethnologist Bjarne Stoklund has written extensively about house types in the North Atlantic, including the Hebrides (1980, 1984), drawing on information gathered by Roussell, Campbell, and Fenton. So far, Stoklund is the only writer, perhaps since Roussell, to look actively at housing traditions in the North Atlantic as a whole, including the Hebrides.

Many other authors have published articles on housing in the Hebrides, on the mainland Highlands, and further afield. German photographer Werner Kissling took many photographs in the Hebrides from the 1930s to the 1950s, although not in Lewis. He published two articles, however, on the type of housing found in the Hebrides (Kissling 1943, 1944). E. Cecil Curwen (1938) published a similar article on the Hebrides in general, while Alan Gailey (1960, 1962), William A. Hance (1951) and Horace Fairhurst (1960; Fairhurst and Dunbar 1971) concentrated on housing and settlement forms on the mainland. Walton (1957) published a review of 'The Skye House'; archaeologist Iain Crawford published 'Contributions to a History of Domestic Settlement in North Uist' in 1965; and, in 1986, Ailean Boyd published *Seann Taighean Tirisdeach*, a review of the vernacular housing on Tiree. There have also been a number of important publications on Irish vernacular housing (Estyn Evans 1939, 1957; Danaher 1978) and on Welsh vernacular housing (Peate 1944; Fox and Raglan 1951-54). Studies such as these serve to place the Lewis house in its wider context in order that local features may be determined and examined in comparison to those in similar socio-cultural and geographic areas.

Possibly the most comprehensive study of vernacular housing in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland was published by architect Colin Sinclair in 1953 under the title *The Thatched Houses of The Old Highlands*. In it he distinguishes between three general house types: the Hebridean Type, the Skye Type, and the Dalriadic Type. In this very general study Sinclair makes broad assumptions about the types of houses found in the Hebrides, the north-west Highlands, and the south-west Highlands. However, although his publication has received much criticism, most notably from Walker (1989b), for its lack of source material and the generality of the study, in my opinion it is of value in its own right, as a typological exercise, and Sinclair's is still the only attempt to compare housing types from throughout the Highlands and Islands.

Other, more recent, authors worthy of mention here are Alexander Fenton, who published *The Island Blackhouse* in 1978, to accompany the 'Blackhouse Museum' at 42 Arnol. The book gives details and plans of the house as it was lived in before it was taken over by Historic Scotland in 1965, and explains the names and uses of different parts of the house. Bruce Walker and Christopher McGregor worked on the restoration of this house and their volume, *The Hebridean Blackhouse*, was subsequently published by Historic Scotland in 1996. This 'Technical Advice Note' contains useful information about construction and materials, as well as some information gathered from locals. Two very useful articles were also published in the Gaelic journal *Gairm*: one by Lewisman Tormod MacLeòid, in 1960 and one by Dòmhnall Dòmhnallach from Uist in 1957. Recently published (September 2005), is *"Back to the wind, front to the sun" The Traditional Croft House* by Caroline Hirst. This volume is an annotated collection of the writings of Angus MacLeod of Calbost, in the Lochs district of Lewis. MacLeod died in 2002, leaving behind him a unique collection of artefacts and a wonderful archive of hand-written notes, relating to Lewis society and culture. This volume brings together MacLeod's writings on the

Lewis houses, although, understandably, it is heavily biased towards the Lochs area of the island.[26]

In the last ten years there have been a number of investigations carried out in the Hebrides by archaeologists from Sheffield and Glasgow. The most relevant of these are excavations in the township of Arnol (Holden et al. 2001; Holden 2004), and excavations at the township of Garenin, near Carloway (Burgess 1995; Burgess & Johnson 1998-99). Excavations have also been carried out on Uist (Symonds 2000), on Barra (Branigan & Merrony 2000; Branigan 2005), and on St. Kilda (Emery 1996). Although some interesting information has been found during these excavations, it also serves to remind us how little we know and how much more could be gained by further investigation.

2.4.5 Oral Sources

There would have been no way to effectively study the use and development of the houses in Bragar without the valuable information provided by the people who lived in them. I spoke to many local residents during my time in Lewis, all of whom were extremely supportive of my research and more than willing to direct me to specific houses and to tell me their memories about them.

The process of finding informants began in March 2002 when I wrote a letter, in Gaelic, to the Stornoway Gazette, explaining who I was and the research I was doing. I stated that I would be in Lewis for a week at the beginning of April and that anybody who thought they might be able to help me could get in touch with me in Edinburgh before hand. I received two replies to this letter, both of which proved fruitful. In addition, a number of the people in Bragar whom I later called on had read the letter and therefore were not completely surprised when they found me at their door.

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[26] I discuss the value of this work further in a book review to be published in *Scottish Archaeological News*, magazine of the Council for Scottish Archaeology, in 2006 (Mackie forthcoming c).

In addition to the letter, I found my informants in a number of ways. I became acquainted with most of my informants through door-to-door inquiries in the area. As most of the lots are now fenced in, it was necessary to seek permission from the owner before gaining access to a number of the ruined houses. This proved to be a useful way to introduce myself to people and to inform them of my interest in the houses. I found other informants, both in Bragar and elsewhere in Lewis, on the recommendation of people I had already spoken to. In these cases also, first contact was usually made in person.

Most of the informants had grown up in one of these houses, many of which were still standing to one degree or another. Some informants had been brought up in new stone and lime or concrete houses, but they, too, were familiar with the older, thatched houses, having grandparents and neighbours who still lived in them. The informants themselves had been party to perhaps the biggest change in the history of housing on the island – the move away from the traditional, stone-built houses into modern, stone and lime or concrete houses. They were also party to changes that occurred in the *genre de vie* during the twentieth century, such as changes in traditional occupations, the migration and emigration of islanders to the mainland and abroad, and changes in local customs and traditions.

During my first fieldwork trip, in April 2002, I made contact with informants and spent some time getting to know them and allowing them to get to know me, talking generally about my research interests and about the houses, and identifying the types of information which each informant could provide. On subsequent trips to Lewis I took with me sets of questions relating to all aspects of the house, such as family life, superstitions, the construction of the house, and agriculture, and I also asked about specific houses in the neighbourhood. With each trip to Lewis I refined my key questions, relating them ever more specifically to each informant, based on the strengths of their knowledge and on our past discussions. Some informants were more knowledgeable about the changing way of life on the island, while others were able to provide me with detailed information about the houses. My aim was to gather information which would enable me to form a picture of life in these houses in

the early twentieth century, for example the way the furniture was positioned and the way space was used, and of the life that went on around them, such as the daily life of the people and their beliefs and attitudes, and to discover how and why this picture changed during the course of the twentieth century. In addition, I wished to gather what information I could about the earlier houses in Lewis – those that were built during the nineteenth century or earlier.

Much of what my informants told me was factual, and some of what they told me was their own thoughts and feelings on the loss of tradition and the changes that had occurred within their community. I also encouraged informants to speculate as to the nature of certain, older houses, of which they, as well as I, knew very little. Unfortunately, it was not as easy as I had hoped to collect the histories of specific houses. People had forgotten the layout of some of the houses that were abandoned many years ago and although they could remember certain details, others were forgotten. Also, on a number of occasions, people remembered a certain feature of the house, only after I had described it in detail as I had heard it from someone else. Thus there was a certain lack of consistency in the information gained from informants.

Over the course of my research in Lewis I conducted semi-formal interviews with a number of informants, which I recorded on cassette or digitally. With other informants, I held informal discussions which were not recorded, but during which I took notes which I would later write-up. In some cases informants did not wish to be recorded, in other cases I did not ask to record the informant, feeling that it might have a negative impact on the discussion or on my relationship with the informant. All discussions and interviews in Lewis took place between April 2002 and July 2004. My method of referencing informants in the thesis is as follows: each informant has been allocated a letter of the alphabet, in order of appearance in the thesis, and they are then referenced in the text as, for example, 'Inf. X' and 'Inf. Y'. A full list of informants can be found before the Bibliography. I have respected the wishes of those who requested to remain anonymous.

After each trip, I compiled detailed notes on the information gained from each informant and collated the notes by subject area, for example, the hearth, agriculture, the wars, and the byre. This then gave me the opportunity to compare the information I had received from various informants on the same subject, and to check it with other sources where possible. On subsequent trips to Lewis, I was then able to clarify any issues which remained unclear and to cross-check information with informants, where I felt this would be useful. Throughout the course of this thesis, I have kept in touch with informants by letter on a regular basis, informing them of my progress and letting them know when I might be back in Lewis.

One other aspect of my fieldwork was the gathering of information from the archives of *Comann Eachdraidh an Taobh Siar* (CEATS), The West Side Historical Society. CEATS was constituted in 1981, in order to 'gather together a range of cultural items which would help preserve something of the way people had lived' (CEATS(a) n.d.). The archives contain transcripts of interviews with local informants from the townships of Arnol, Bragar, Shawbost, and Dalbeag which were taken throughout the 1980s, on the subject of housing, schooling, fishing, and agriculture, to name but a few. The archives also contain other relevant snippets of information, taken from newspapers or from census returns, along with a large collection of photographs. I was granted full access to CEATS archives and found them to contain a wealth of information on twentieth century Lewis. To preserve the privacy of the informants and their families, with whom I had no direct contact, where I have referenced information found in CEATS archives, I have referred to the folder from which it came, rather than the interviewee themselves. The initials SC refer to the folder 'Saoghal a' Chroiteir' ('The crofters' world'). CEATS now have a web-site (http://www.ceats.org.uk) which contains some of the information found in their archives. Due to the time limits of the thesis, and the volume of information to be found in the archives of Historical Societies throughout Lewis, I have only looked in any depth at CEATS archives. I have restricted my research of other Historical Societies to that information which can be found on Historical Society web-sites, such as http://www.c-e-n.org/, belonging to *Comunn Eachdraidh Nis* (CEN), the Ness Historical Society.

2.5 Analysis

The sources described above have fallen into three main categories: (1) physical evidence – the houses in Bragar, (2) written evidence – first-hand, second-hand, published and unpublished, and (3) oral evidence – information gathered orally over the last three years together with the oral information preserved in the archives of the local Historical Society. There is also a certain amount of archaeological evidence from excavations in other parts of Lewis and elsewhere in the Hebrides.

This thesis is an attempt to bring together this wide variety of sources to look at the development of the houses in Bragar over specific time periods. Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, deal in turn with the early MacKenzie period (from 1610 to 1783), the late MacKenzie period (1783-1844), the Matheson period (1844-1900) and the twentieth century. Each part will look both at changes in *genre de vie* and at changes in housing.

Information about *genre de vie* in each time period will be gained from both written and oral sources; the information in Chapters 4 and 5 will come mainly from written sources, while the information in Chapters 6 and 7 will also come from oral sources. Where information has been collected from only one source, particularly an oral source, this has been checked, where possible, with other sources – written, oral and physical – to see if the information can be upheld. Where there is any doubt as to the authenticity of the information, this will be noted in the text.

Information about the design and use of the houses will, in the first instance, come from an analysis of the forty-one houses examined and surveyed in Bragar. General information about the size of the houses, and the number of units, or rooms, in them can be gauged from a comparison of plans from the different time phases. Information about these houses will be substantiated by local knowledge from oral sources. A number of the houses examined and measured in Bragar will be used to

show specific details or changes. Examples will also be used from elsewhere in Lewis and, where appropriate, comparisons will be made with housing elsewhere in the Hebrides and elsewhere in the world.

Any correlation between changes in *genre de vie* and changes in housing use and design will be noted and examined in greater detail in each chapter. This will then lead to a Conclusion based on the main aim of the thesis which is to discover to what extent *genre de vie* influenced the design and use of these houses during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Bragar. The Conclusion will bring together the results of each chapter and will highlight any recurrent themes. The effects of the physical environment, such as climate, geology, and geography, on housing use and design will be examined in Chapter 4, when the houses are introduced, and will be touched on throughout Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the area of study, detailing the choices made and the reasons behind them. It has explained the importance of the use of Gaelic within the thesis, and the problems arising with some commonly used terminology. This chapter has also shown the wide variety of source material that is available in order to study the development of both the housing and the *genre de vie* in Lewis, looking at the way these sources will be dealt with in this thesis, and at any potential problems with them. The structure of the thesis has been explained, as has the method of analysis.

Chapter 3

Architectural History and Change

Introduction

The first section of this chapter looks at the nature of change in vernacular architecture. Causes of change, motivations for change, and the process of change are discussed, as is the idea of continuity in material culture, and the ways in which change can manifest in vernacular architecture. The second section of this chapter deals with the history of vernacular architecture in Lewis and the surrounding area, showing the diversity of building types, in time and in space, from the Neolithic to the Modern period. This chapter concludes by looking in more detail at this diversity of housing types in modern times, and examines possible reasons for such diversity.

3.1 The Nature of Change in Vernacular Architecture

The belief that the only thing that is constant is change can be traced back as far as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus in the 6th-5th century BCE and it applies as much to vernacular architecture as to any other sphere of life.

Before discussing the nature of change in vernacular architecture, however, it would be useful to briefly review the nature of vernacular architecture itself. As touched upon in Chapter 1, vernacular architecture, and indeed architecture in general, can serve many purposes. It should be seen not only as a shelter from the extremes of the environment, but as a construction in which people give form to their cultural ideals. It is imbued with the characteristics of a certain society and is built within a certain environmental context.

For the purpose of this thesis, I have hypothesized that material culture may be defined as the manifestation of a *genre de vie* within its specific environmental context. In other words, material culture encompasses the physical artefacts of a group of people, including their architecture. If it is accepted that material culture is

the manifestation of *genre de vie* within its specific environmental context, then it must also be accepted that changes in *genre de vie* will effect changes in material culture. In order to discuss the changes that take place in vernacular architecture, or in any other form of material culture, one must also discuss the changes that take place in the relevant *genre de vie*. Only then may we discover the ways in which a changing *genre de vie*, or indeed certain specific changes in *genre de vie*, might effect material change.

As both vernacular architecture and *genre de vie* are specific to a particular community existing in a particular place and at a particular time, it is impossible to generate a model of change that would apply to all forms of vernacular architecture and *genres de vie*. A systematic and specific examination of the causes and effects active in Lewis, and specifically in Bragar, between the eighteenth and the twentieth century, will follow throughout the course of this thesis. At this point in the thesis it is necessary to identify the various factors involved in change in vernacular architecture, looking at the process of socio-cultural, and particularly material, change in more general terms. To do this, I have drawn heavily on the work of a number of scholars, including Stoklund (1980), Rapoport (1984), and, particularly, Murdock (1960). I have found Murdock's to be the most concise, yet comprehensive, description of culture change, and one that could be easily adapted to a discussion of material culture change.

3.1.1 Underlying Causes of Material Change

There are a number of ways in which socio-cultural and environmental changes can bring about changes in vernacular architecture. Environmentally, a climate change could lead to a change in the available building materials, or to the need for a different type of housing. Socio-culturally, economic change can affect material culture. A time of economic prosperity can lead to possibilities of change where they may not have existed before. On the other hand, economic decline may also lead to change – of a more negative nature. A change in ideology may also make change conceivable where it was not considered possible or important before. It may re-condition the mind to accept changes that were previously unacceptable and may

make certain changes desirable that were previously undesirable. Changing ideas about comfort or privacy, for example, can lead to changes in the layout or use of space within the house. Changing ideas about fashion may affect the interior or exterior decoration of the house, as well as the interior furnishings, which in turn may affect the internal use of space. One other important element within socio-cultural change that is relevant here is that of changing technology. Technological improvements make possible changes where they were not possible before. This may be due to advancements in transport and communication allowing greater access to new materials and ideas, or mechanical advancements that make possible the use of new materials and new equipment.

Just as there is more than one solution to the design of vernacular architecture in a particular environmental context, so there is a variety of material solutions available to answer any one particular need or desire for change. The chosen solution will itself be a product of a group's or an individual's *genre de vie* within a specific environmental context:

> Different people may not only make different choices among the alternatives available (within the rules set by the culture for the group) but the alternatives available also differ. This is not only due to the setting, resources, and other limitations and constraints. It is also due to the previous choices made. People begin with *different repertoires* (Rapoport 1984: 162, italics in original).

This idea of a group's or an individual's 'repertoire', i.e. their histories and previous choices and experiences, recurs throughout this thesis, both in relation to the authorities (be they landowners or official bodies) and the tenants. Individual and group 'repertoire' will be shown to have played an important part in decisions that were made which, in turn, influenced housing change on Lewis.

3.1.2 Motivations for Material Change

Having established the underlying causes of material change, we may then look at the motivations for material change that changes in environment and *genre de vie* may bring about. When people are faced with such underlying environmental and socio-cultural changes, they may understand, process, or translate, them in different

ways. Their motivations for change are their perceived reasons for responding to changing factors in the way that they do.

For motivations towards change to exist, however, change must be seen to be possible. Things that may not have been previously possible must first be made possible, whether this be economically or technologically or ideologically. For example, plumbing and electricity were desired in many areas before the technology and economics were in place to allow them to be installed. In some parts of the world it was only after a change in ideology (itself brought about through a number of socio-cultural changes) that internal plumbing became acceptable and thus possible (cf. Hardie 1984). As well as change being made possible, however, an incentive or motivation for change must also exist: 'A people rarely borrows an alien cultural element when they already possess a trait which satisfactorily fills the same need' (Murdock 1960: 255).

I propose that motivations for change are of two general types: necessity and advantage. Some types of change are born out of necessity. Such changes may be perceived by a group or an individual to be necessary to their survival or well-being. Alternatively, the change may be necessary to solve a particular problem or to ensure the smooth-running of the community. For example, a change from peat to coal as the main source of fuel made it necessary for hearths to be raised above floor level (Fenton 1981: 29) and for the construction of chimneys to remove the smoke (Boyd 1986: 17). A growth in population, and environmental or economic change can often bring about material change through necessity.

There is another type of motivation which I believe should be classed as a necessity, in contexts such as the present one, and that motivation is external force. Force could come from an individual or group in a position of authority. A large number of communities throughout the world have come under pressure to change, particularly to modernise (generally to westernise) by the cultural group in authority (cf. Lewcock 1997; see also Vestbro 1975 on Africa; Waterson 1993: 27-42 on South-East Asia; and Rensel and Rodman 1997 on the Pacific Islands). These changes are

often concerned with people's living conditions, with changes being enforced with regard to individual houses and to settlements. An authority may see the enforced changes as being for the benefit of the people, and may consider such changes as bringing about physical and moral improvements within the society. However, what is deemed acceptable or desirable by those in authority may not be seen as such by the community itself.

The second type of motivation is one of advantage, both material and social. Change for material advantage can come about, for example, through the introduction of new materials or of new ideas. The introduction of plumbing and electricity can be considered change for physical advantage. Change based on fashion, prestige or status can bring a social advantage, and such change is closely related to social identity. This can work in at least two ways. On the one hand, an individual or group may seek to align themselves with a higher status individual or group, in order to better their own status through adopting elements of the material culture of the reference group (Stoklund 1980: 123, 1984: 97; Miller 1982). On the other hand, an individual or group may seek to assert or reassert their current status or identity, distinguishing it from all other groups by strengthening or defining their own material culture (Stoklund 1980: 123).

Motivations for change are not mutually exclusive. A change motivated by social advantage may also be to a material advantage and vice versa. Likewise, changes which are motivated by necessity may also turn out to be socially or materially advantageous.

3.1.3 The Process of Material Change

Having looked at the underlying causes of change, and the perceived motivations to change, we must now look at the process of change itself. This process is at least threefold. Firstly, the change has to be conceived, secondly, the change has to be made, and thirdly, the change is then evaluated by the individual and by the society. Once the change as been conceived, there are three methods by which material change can be made. I shall term these diffusion, innovation, and invention. Any of

the motivations for change discussed above can be achieved by any of these three methods.

Diffusion is by far the most common method of material change and it generally relies on some form of contact between groups of people (Murdock 1960: 253-54; Pounds 1993: 20-24). Elements that already exist within one group are adopted by another. Through diffusion, socio-cultural traits and material culture spread geographically, both within and between cultures. Diffusion between cultures may also be called 'external diffusion' (Murdock 1960: 258), and improvements in transport and communication can be seen as aids to external diffusion. Diffusion can also be brought about through migration of people. In this context, marriage is one of the most effective methods: in rural areas, where marriage between townships is common, very often the newcomer to the township will bring with them objects or ways of doing things that were common in their township (ibid.: 255).

Another form of diffusion is that of emulation. Through emulation, change can spread between different classes in the same culture where the lower classes wish to move up the social scale and thus employ traits associated with a higher class, or reference group (Stoklund 1980: 123). The reference group is usually the class directly above them on the social scale (Miller 1982, Raglan 1963, Smith 1975). In rural areas, the reference group may be the nearest town population. However, it may also be a neighbouring village whose inhabitants may possess talents in certain areas (Stoklund 1980: 123). Emulation may sometimes happen 'from the bottom up' with groups of people higher up the social scale emulating certain traits of those lower down, for example the recent trends in going 'back to nature' or the fashion trend for scruffy clothes. Duncan (1973), in his study of village housing in Westchester, in New York State, found that the housing of the higher social-class inhabitants, in traditional country cottages, was much more low-key than that of the lower social-classes who attempted to elevate the status of their more modern houses with exterior decoration: 'High socio-economic groups try to appear as though they always have had money and no longer have to display it' (Duncan 1973: 353). While the mailboxes in the lower-class area were 'expensive and ornate', those in the

higher-class area were 'standard rural-route mailboxes' (ibid.: 347). Emulation 'from the top down' is more common, however, particularly in vernacular societies. This type of diffusion may also be called 'internal diffusion' as it occurs within a culture (Murdock 1960: 258).

Innovation, sometimes called variation (Murdock 1960: 250-52), occurs when previously existing objects are changed in some way, whether in their appearance or in their use. One form of innovation involves adaptation to changing circumstances. One example of this would be an emigrating people, such as the Scottish emigrants to Canada in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, adapting their house building skills to make use of the available building materials. Adaptation is often the result of necessity rather than advantage. I also believe, however, that innovation can exist without it simply being an adaptation to changing circumstances when, for example, innovation is made for social or material advantage. An example of this might be the development of corrugated iron and its introduction as a walling and roofing material. This was an innovation seen to offer, at that time, both material and social advantage (to use it was to be able to afford it). Innovation can also occur in the process of diffusion when a socio-cultural element is not adopted in its entirety. Thus a people may adopt certain aspects of a new idea while at the same time adapting them to suit their own needs: 'Confronted with a novelty, people do not simply adopt it. Instead, they accept actively, dismembering the novelty, taking from it what they want when they want it, then discarding the residue' (Glassie 1982: 402).

Material change may also take place as a result of invention. Through invention a completely new object is created or, in terms of socio-cultural change, a completely new idea or behaviour. According to Murdock (1960: 252), invention is most likely to occur by accident. It occurs more often through necessity than advantage, in response to a certain problem, particularly in times of crises where people will

> ordinarily try out first a number of variations and recombinations of existing habitual responses, but if all of these fail they will resort to 'random behaviour,' in the course of which they may accidentally hit upon some novel response which solves the problem and thereby becomes established as a new cultural element (Murdock 1960: 252).

Invention is the least common of all three methods as, more often than not, an effective solution will be found in an innovation of an existing element, or existing in a neighbouring community. This is perhaps less true today as it was in times past, as today's society on the whole actively seeks invention. This is true in many areas of life, and perhaps particularly in the sciences and in marketing.

It is important to note that change must always begin with an individual. He or she may have the consent of the group but the first move to change is always made by an individual (Rapoport 1984: 162). As mentioned above, there may be a number of different solutions to any one need or desire for change. Each solution must be evaluated in terms of the benefits and risks involved. Without group consensus, or if the decision is to be made solely at an individual level (for example painting the exterior of one's house blue), the risks (particularly the social risks) may seem to be greater as the reaction of the rest of the group is unknown. Once an individual has introduced a change, the change can then be assessed by the community or society into which it has been introduced, and either accepted or rejected. Murdock (1960: 257-60) has divided this third part of the process into three stages: 'social acceptance', 'selective elimination', and 'integration'.

The change may be accepted on a number of levels, beginning with the individual who made the change. If it is accepted at this first level, through a process of 'internal diffusion' it may then spread to other members of the family or social group and, if it is accepted, into the wider community. It may be rejected by the community at any time. The degree to which a particular change is accepted may depend somewhat on the status of the individual who introduced the change, and of the first group to accept it (Murdock 1960: 258).

Once a change has been accepted, there follows a process of 'selective elimination'. At this point, the survival of any one change, or solution, depends on a process similar to that of natural selection whereby the change must prove its worth against all other alternatives (Murdock 1960: 258; cf. Steadman 1979: 74-102). As *genre de vie* is constantly changing, it is those changes that prove to be the most adaptive that

are the most likely to survive (Murdock 1960: 259). Even changes which are eliminated by the community, however, may survive in some places, even if it is only with the individual or household who introduced it. For example one house painted blue may be accepted by the individual who introduced it, but it need not be adopted by the rest of the street.

'Integration' is a form of adaptation whereby each survival must integrate with each other survival, in a continually changing physical and socio-cultural environment.

> Every innovation alters in some respect the situations under which certain other forms of habitual behaviour occur, and leads to adaptive changes in the latter. Similarly it must, in its turn, be adjusted to modifications elsewhere in the culture. While each such change is in itself, of course, an innovation, their reciprocal interaction and cumulative effect deserve special recognition as an integrative process (Murdock 1960: 259-60).

Through integration, it is often the case that change leads to more change. An enclosed hearth, for example, will require a different method for hanging the pot above the fire than an open hearth, and this in turn may require a different type of pot hook (cf. Fenton 1981: 30).

It should also be noted that change is not always a sign of progress. As mentioned above, the motivation for change need not be a positive one. Scarcity and poverty can bring about change just as easily as economic prosperity. And while some things may ultimately be gained by a particular change, others might be lost. The movement of the central hearth to a gable or a partition wall, and its subsequent replacement by a fuel burning stove was undoubtedly beneficial. However some who experienced the change from fire to stove have commented that the food does not taste as good when cooked on the stove (Glassie 1982: 414, 421-24). Also, people cannot gather round the stove as they would have gathered round a central hearth. The introduction of the television, and the telephone, although undoubtedly beneficial, has also contributed to the decline of the traditional *cèilidh*, where neighbours and family members would gather round the hearth in the evening to exchange news, tell stories, and sing songs.

3.1.4 Continuity

Having considered the process and reasons for material and socio-cultural change, we must also consider material and socio-cultural continuity. From a socio-cultural point of view, *genre de vie* is constantly changing and thus there can be no overall continuity. There may, however, be continuity in the different elements that make up a particular *genre de vie*.

When a material change is rejected, it may be because another solution more successfully answers the problem, or it may be that the existing solution provided by the status quo is preferred. Often change can be accepted by some in a community and rejected by others, particularly if the change involves not only a gain, but also a loss. Some members of the community may feel that the change is not absolutely necessary or that the benefits are outweighed by the losses. People's decisions to change or not to change, as Rapoport (1984: 162) stated, are based on their own 'repertoires' (i.e. their previous choices and experiences) and thus not every person or group will necessarily come up with the same solution, or be willing to implement a certain change.

I suggest that this type of continuity, which involves a rejection of change, is not simply a lack of change but, like change, is the end product of a process in which a decision in made. Therefore it may be usefully termed 'conscious continuity' – although no change is being made, a conscious decision was made, for whatever reason, not to implement the suggested change.

Tradition is also a form of continuity – something that is always done a certain way and it has been done that way for a long time. This type of continuity, which is not the result of a conscious decision, may be usefully termed 'historical continuity'. It may be that the advantage of using a certain socio-cultural feature has been forgotten, however this feature may continue unchanged simply because it is accepted as having 'always been that way'.

Continuity and change are often present at the same time. A good example of this would be the back-stones that were, in some areas of Scotland, commonly built to one side of a central hearth. This stone was used to protect the fire from draughts and would also have thrown back the heat of the fire. It was also useful for putting things on. When the hearth was moved to a gable wall, very often the back-stone was still built. This would be necessary if the gable wall was made of turf, as was sometimes the case, but there would be no need for a back-stone in a hearth built against a stone gable. Fenton (1981: 27) describes such back-stones as being perhaps 'a hangover from the turf-gable tradition'. This type of continuity is a form of historical continuity as it involves the continuation of a tradition, however it could also be considered a form of conscious continuity as the decision was made to continue the use of a traditional element, even though its setting had changed. Therefore continuity need not be exclusively 'historical' or 'conscious'.

3.1.5 Ways in which Change Manifests in Vernacular Architecture

Change can manifest in vernacular architecture in a number of ways. There may be a change in size (a building or a room may be made larger or smaller), a change in layout (an altered interior plan or a change in the use of the space), a change in construction materials or technique, a change in the façade (possibly due to a change in layout), a change in décor (both interior and exterior), or a change in furnishings (the types of furnishing and their meaning, use, and position within the house).

I propose that these types of changes may be usefully classified under four general headings: Fabric, Features, Furnishing, and Function.

- 'Fabric' refers to the main constructed fabric of the building: the walls, the floor, and the roof. Changes in the fabric of a building can include a change of building materials or of construction technique.
- 'Features' refers to those elements that are built into the fabric of the building (for example the hearth, the windows, and the doors). Changes in style and in position are common changes to housing features.
- 'Furnishings' covers not only furniture but also décor, both inside and outside the house, and includes the physical objects of everyday life that are kept in the

house, such as implements and personal effects. Changes in fashion and style, a developing 'repertoire' (Rapoport 1984: 162), and a growing family are common causes of furnishing changes.

- 'Function' refers to the siting and the layout of the house and the use of space within it. Changes in function may include changes in the uses made of a particular room, or the addition of an extra room or rooms.

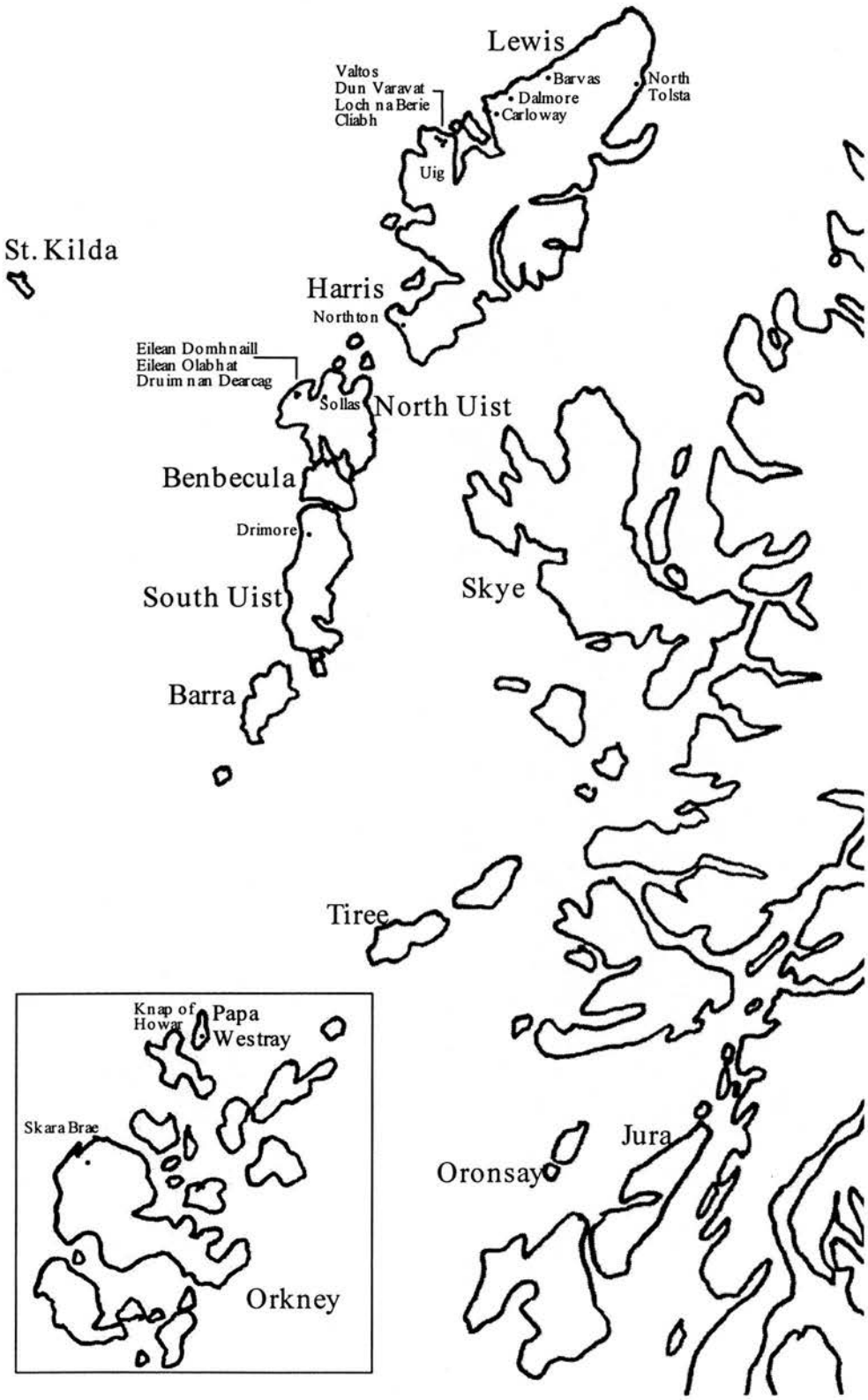
Any motivation, and any method, may result in change in any of these four categories.

3.2 A Brief History of Vernacular Architecture in Lewis and in the Hebrides

In order to place the modern houses that I will be studying into their historical context, this section will discuss the architectural history of Lewis and the surrounding area (Map 15). It will be seen that change, continuity, and geographical diversity have been occurring in the vernacular architecture of northern Scotland for millennia, and that construction techniques used in houses during the Neolithic period are relevant to the discussion of nineteenth and twentieth century housing in Lewis.

3.2.1 Neolithic (c.4000 – c.2000BCE)

There have been people living in Scotland since Mesolithic times (Armit 1998: 33), and evidence of Mesolithic settlements dating from around 7000BCE has been found on the islands of Jura and Oronsay (Piggott 1996: 22-23). Little is known about the houses of these early people however, and it is not until the Neolithic period, some four thousand years later, that we see any decipherable remains. Although no Neolithic houses have yet been identified on Lewis, a number of sites have been excavated in North Uist. At *Eilean Dòmhnuill* (Donald's Island), in *Loch Olabhat*, on the west coast of North Uist, phases of settlement have been excavated that consist of a number of rectilinear buildings with rounded corners and central hearths.



Map 15: Orkney and The Hebrides (by the author)

Similar to the Neolithic houses at Knap of Howar on Papa Westray in Orkney, the walls at *Eilean Dòmhnuill* were constructed of an inner and an outer facing of stone, 'packed with earth and rubble' (Armit 1992, 1998: 48). We shall see below that this method of wall construction was also in use in the Modern period.

3.2.2 Bronze Age (c.2000 – c.700BCE)

There is very little evidence for Bronze Age settlement in the Hebrides. Excavation at Dalmore, on the west coast of Lewis, revealed one building, dating from the Early Bronze Age, that had started life as an oval structure before becoming circular and, in a subsequent phase, rectangular (Sharples 1984: 235). An excavation at Northton in Harris revealed an oval structure with a central hearth, built into the sand, with an inner drystone wall. Most of the houses of this period have been found on areas of *machair* (coastal plains of sand) and seem to have been sunk into the sand with drystone walling lining the inside – an effective technique of building which survived in these areas at least until the coming of the Norse (Armit 1998: 90). It is worth noting that all Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements discovered so far in the Western Isles consist of no more than a few houses, in stark contrast to the types of nucleated settlements which can have been found in Orkney, for example at Skara Brae. In the Later Bronze Age, from around 1200-1000BCE (Armit 1997: 15), there is very little evidence for settlement in the Hebrides. From the evidence we do have, hut circles of stone or of timber seem to have been the most common form of settlement during this period, particularly in the Southern Hebrides and on the west coast. A number of sites have been identified in the Western Isles that may date back to this time, including the crannog (an artificially created island construction) at North Tolsta (Blundell 1913) and the settlement of Dun Varavat at Kneep in Uig (Harding and Armit 1990), both in Lewis. This marks the start of the roundhouse tradition in the Hebrides; a period of circular building which was to last throughout the Iron Age until the arrival of the Norse around the ninth century AD.

3.2.3 Iron Age (c.700BCE – c.500CE)

The beginning of the first millennium BCE marked the introduction of what has recently been termed the 'Atlantic roundhouse' and it was during this period that 'the settlement itself, the centre of the domestic arena, became dominant' (Armit 1998: 114-15). This class of building has been divided into 'simple' and 'complex' roundhouses. Simple Atlantic roundhouses are those which do not contain the architectural complexity seen in many 'complex' roundhouses, such as the inclusion of intra-mural stairs and cells (ibid.: 115-17).

To this date, no simple Atlantic roundhouses have been found in the Hebrides. All roundhouses excavated have proved to contain features that place them in the category of 'complex' Atlantic roundhouses, the best known of which are the brochs (Figure 3 and Figure 4).[27]

Figure 3: Broch at Dun Carloway, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 1998)

[27] More information can be gained about brochs and Atlantic roundhouses in general in Armit (1990, 2003).

Figure 4: Broch at Dun Carloway, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 1998)

These not only contained intra-mural galleries and cells, but also contained at least one upper level, presumably floored with timber, and reached by a stairway contained within the thickness of the double-skinned wall. There is some debate as to the use of the internal space of the complex Atlantic roundhouses. In the Northern Isles, there is evidence for radial partitions within the brochs, however no internal partitioning has yet been discovered in any of the roundhouses found in the Western Isles (Armit 1998: 157). Some of the brochs may have housed animals on the ground floor, with the people residing on the upper levels, thus explaining the lack of partitions on the ground, but this was probably not the case in some of the smaller brochs (ibid.: 125-27). The roofs were probably of timber, conical shaped, and presumably thatched. It is now generally accepted that these buildings were houses rather than defensive structures, despite their size, and further excavations may provide a clearer idea of how these buildings were used internally. What does seem clear, however, is that they were used by more than one level of society, given the wide range of size of brochs and also the variety of different sites on which they were built (ibid.: 130). In other words, they were not just houses of the elite (ibid.: 230). In one sense, it seems as if the builders of the brochs showed a careless

disregard for the natural environment: they built tall buildings which would have been very exposed to high winds, and to roof and floor them must have required much timber, which would have been in short supply in many areas. However, the effects of the wind at least would have been counteracted by the stability of the building, due to its size and shape, and by the fact that there were no exterior wall openings. In addition, recent research by architect John Hope has shown that the design of the broch interiors may have been carefully designed to create the ideal interior environment: voids in the inner wall may have been designed specifically to let air circulate throughout the building, keeping the structure dry and the inhabitants warm (Armit 1997: 37).

In contrast to the outward monumentality of the broch towers, the next phase of building took its monumentality inside the building. Towards the end of the first millennium BCE, wheelhouses started to appear. As the name suggests, wheelhouses were circular buildings, the interiors of which comprised a series of corbelled stone piers, showing a very clear division of space within the house (Armit 1998: 136-58). Some were built in the ruins of earlier roundhouses, while most were built into the ground. The exact use of space within the building is still unclear although it seems, from excavations at Sollas in North Uist, that each cell in the wheelhouse may have had a specific use, for example some for sleeping, some for food storage, and some for work (Figure 5). There is also some evidence to suggest that this use of space may have been consistent throughout wheelhouse construction, because similar artefacts have been found in the same position in different wheelhouses (Campbell 1991; Armit 1998: 114). During excavation it was also found that 'votive offerings' were placed both behind the revetting wall and in the floor, which suggests that some significance was given to ritual performance of some kind during the construction of the building (Campbell 1991; Armit 1998: 139). The wheelhouses would have had a central hearth, and it was not unusual for them to have one or more cells attached to them which were accessible from the main structure, and which were possibly used for storage. Whereas the broch towers could divide space vertically, between different floors, the wheelhouses had to do so on just one level (Armit 1998: 144).

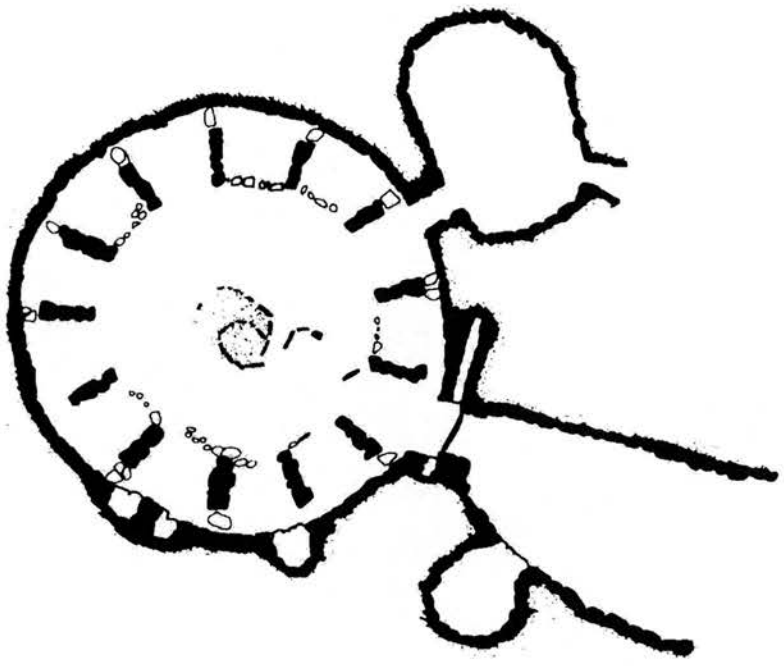


Figure 5: Plan of wheelhouse at Sollas, North Uist (Armit 1997: 42)
(Reproduced courtesy of Historic Scotland)

The change from roundhouse to wheelhouse can be seen to be a symptom of wider socio-cultural changes. As Armit (1998: 158) suggests:

> The change from Atlantic roundhouse to wheelhouse building as the principal form of domestic architecture clearly signalled a major change in the perception of the domestic residence. There were environmental pressures involved perhaps; for example, the wastefulness of scarce timber and the unnecessary exposure to wind and cold in the roundhouses. But these pressures were not new and are not a sufficient explanation for the change. The inward-looking monumentality of the wheelhouses, compared with the outward-looking Atlantic roundhouses, suggests that contacts between communities and individuals may increasingly have been taking place inside these buildings. Competition and mutual suspicion over rights to resources may have been replaced by social competition aimed more at demonstrating the status of the wheelhouse inhabitants.

3.2.4 Early Historic (c.500 – c.800CE)

The first millennium CE, until the arrival of the Norse, was dominated by the development of a cellular type of architecture. Many examples were built into the remains of wheelhouses and roundhouses, while others were semi-subterranean

(Figure 6). It appears that, in some cases, settlement was continuous from the wheelhouse period into this first millennium. Discussing the settlement at Kneep in Lewis, Armit (1998: 164) concludes: 'At some point the decision was taken to re-model the whole settlement and to abandon the spatial arrangements of the wheelhouse.' No doubt this was not a decision that was taken lightly. At Kneep, some of the radial bays were blocked up and the central hearth rebuilt. New, interconnecting cellular structures were built in the wheelhouse and around it. The cells that were built outside the wheelhouse were also built into the sand. At *Loch na Berie* in Lewis, the broch was also reused with cells being built into its interior space. Internal stone furnishings were also found at Berie: two shelves or seats had been built into the wall opposite the entrance (Harding 1993; Armit 1998: 167). According to Armit (1998: 169) this could be related to the presence of ritual deposits found in the same position, opposite the entrance, in a number of wheelhouses. This may be particularly relevant if the furnishings were indeed shelves and were used to display important household items, similar to the dresser displays so common in nineteenth and twentieth century houses in Lewis and elsewhere. At Berie, some of the internal divisions of earlier buildings were retained, suggesting that there was some form of internal division in the newer, cellular structures (Armit 1998: 169).

These cellular buildings were much more suited to their environment than the roundhouses. They would have had sufficient shelter from the weather by either being built into the *machair* or by virtue of being constructed inside an existing building. The new walls were double skinned with an inner core of midden (i.e. refuse) and they would also have been roofed much more easily, requiring smaller timbers to span a smaller roof area (Armit 1998: 171). Although the internal architecture was much less impressive than that of the wheelhouses, and the external architecture less impressive than the roundhouses, there was still a certain amount of spatial organisation that seems to have been common in a number of houses (ibid.: 171).

Figure 6: Early Historic, semi-subterranean cellular houses, Bosta Beach, Bernera, Lewis

(Photograph taken by the author, 1998)

It has been suggested that this change in building styles was, at this point, due to a change in emphasis from the importance of household to the importance of the individual, with valued objects becoming more personal and more mobile, such as jewellery (Armit 1998: 184-85; cf. Rapoport 1980: 293-94). The continuity of settlement sites suggests that land use underwent little change during this period (Armit 1998: 184-85) and cannot, therefore, account for such drastic changes in housing design.

3.2.5 Norse (c.800 – c.1100CE)

Few sites of Norse settlement have yet been discovered in the Western Isles, and fewer have been excavated. Given the large number of Norse place-names in the area, it can be assumed that there must have been a significant number of settlement sites, however it is possible that they now lie under later buildings and have yet to be discovered (Armit 1998: 188). At Drimore in South Uist, a rectilinear building was found and excavated. The walls were less than a metre thick, suggesting that the

upper walls may have been built of turf. The centre of the building contained a long rectangular hearth and it is possible that livestock were housed at the west end of the building (Maclaren 1974; Armit 1998: 190-91). This type of house (the 'hall-house') has also been found in the Northern Isles, in Iceland, and in the Faeroe Islands, and the house at Drimore seems to date from the late ninth or early tenth century CE (Armit 1998: 191). One Norse site has been excavated at Barvas in Lewis which seems to date from the tenth or eleventh century CE. The remains of two sub-rectangular houses were found, the walls of which were drystone and double-skinned, with a turf filling (ibid.: 192).

3.2.6 Medieval (c.1100 – c.1600CE)

Between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries there is very little evidence of the housing of the common people. This is partly due to the focus, in archaeology, on prehistory, and partly to the lack of evidence on the ground. It is likely that many of the houses in the Western Isles were constructed of turf and indeed this practice of building with turf survived down to the twentieth century in some areas, most notably in the Uists (Curwen 1938: 272; cf. Dodgshon 1993a: 421-24) and in Lewis (Dittmar and Millar 1905; MacKenzie 1917: 442, 446; Morrison 1997). The remains of buildings such as this are rarely visible on the ground and documentary evidence suggests that they were dismantled regularly and the soot-filled turf and thatch used as manure on the crops (e.g. OSA 1797: 266; OSA 1793: 375-6). A number of turf buildings have been identified in the Western Isles through excavation, but without further investigation it is impossible to say how representative these buildings are (Armit 1998: 208).

In North Uist, excavation at *Eilean Olabhat* has shown that some time after the abandonment of the early historic cellular building in the sixth or seventh century, a sub-rectangular house was built in the ruin of the cellular building and a new small building constructed nearby (Armit 1998: 208). A partition wall divided the new building into two areas, with the hearth being built against the partition on the north side, near the entrance (Figure 7). Pottery found within the building has been dated to the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries CE (ibid.: 208).

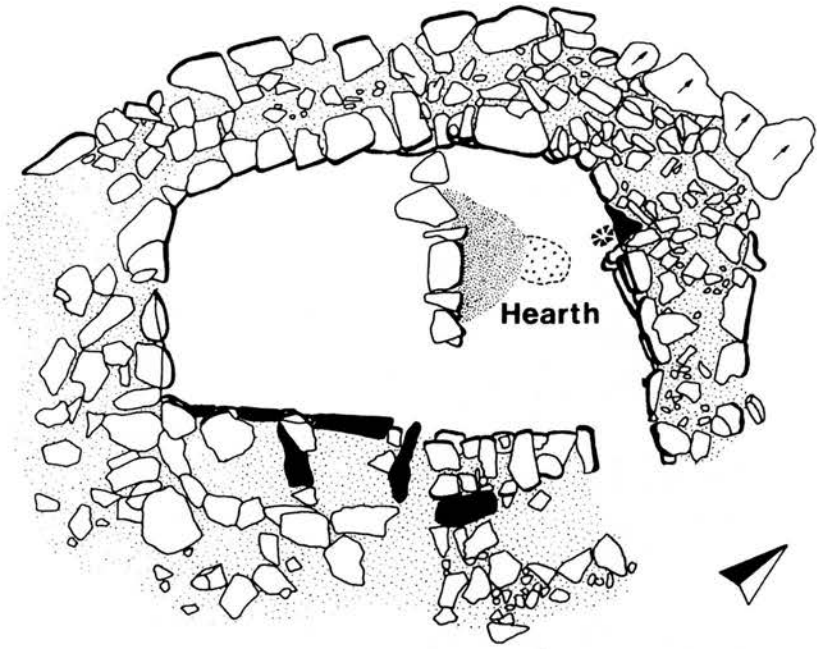


Figure 7: Plan of Medieval building on Eilean Olabhat, North Uist (Armit 1998: 209)

(Reproduced courtesy of Historic Scotland)

At *Druim nan Dearcag*, on the shore of *Loch Olabhat* in North Uist, one of two rectilinear buildings was excavated. It was originally a boat-shaped structure, with a rectilinear interior. 'The inner walls were lined with upright slabs, whilst the outer wall was of simple stone coursing, forming the base of a turf superstructure. An informal hearth dominated the centre of the structure' (Armit 1998: 210). At some later point the southern half of the building was rebuilt and extended. A partition wall was introduced and the entrance moved from the west to the east wall. This site seems to date to the fifteenth or sixteenth century. At Valtos in Lewis a similar rectilinear house with rounded ends was found at *Clibhe* (Armit 1994: 87).

3.2.7 Post-Medieval (c.1600 – 1900CE)

It is difficult, due to the paucity and nature of the physical evidence, to place an exact date on the appearance of the nineteenth and twentieth century houses that I will be studying in this thesis. It is difficult also to come up with any obvious predecessors to these houses, or to trace their type back in history. Generally they are rectilinear

structures with rounded ends, double-skinned walls, and thatched roofs. The different types of houses to be found throughout the Hebrides are described below. It has been suggested in the past that the ancestor of these houses was the Norse long-house, but without more evidence of the intervening periods, no conclusive history can be traced and, as Armit (1998: 214) suggests, 'it is perhaps unlikely that there was any one form of "proto-blackhouse" ancestral to the later forms that characterised the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.

3.2.8 Development and Diversity

Archaeology can be used to enhance our knowledge, not only of early settlement structures and agricultural systems, but of early social systems and ways of life. By looking at the past we can see the ways in which vernacular architecture developed and the possible reasons for this. It becomes clear, looking at the past two millennia, that houses and settlement forms in the Western Isles were constantly changing, as was the social and cultural world of which they formed a part. With the possible exception of the arrival of the Norse, the development of one building tradition into another seems to have been largely continuous.

By looking at history we can see that there has always been diversity in building traditions, even over relatively short geographical distances. Diversity can, in many cases, be explained by environmental factors. In areas where timber was prevalent, this would often be the preferred building material; in other areas stone or turf was used. As we have seen, however, Iron Age builders often showed what may seem to have been a careless disregard for environmental factors. In addition, social and cultural differences also played an important part in the architectural diversity of the past. Wheelhouses, for example, although common in the Western Isles and also in Shetland, have not been found at all in Orkney or in Skye (Armit 1998: 136). It is unlikely that this diversity was due to environmental differences. Likewise, in the Northern Isles, the Bronze Age structures were cellular, and the organisation of their roundhouses followed these cellular patterns. In the Hebrides, however, circular building appears to have been common in the Bronze Age and this is reflected in the round open interiors of their roundhouses (ibid.: 116). Where there is no

environmental reason for such diversity, the diversity can sometimes be explained in socio-cultural terms. For example, in the Northern Isles, villages were built up around a central broch, making visible the social hierarchy of the communities. In the Hebrides, although brochs are plentiful, there is no evidence for such 'broch villages' (ibid.: 122):

> In Orkney [...] a pattern developed of increasing nucleation of settlement and centralisation of power which was expressed in the elaboration of the broch tower. Fewer but larger broch settlements emerged as Orcadian elites became more powerful. In the west, though, power over people does not seem to have been expressed through monumental domestic architecture. Undoubtedly there were significant differences in status among communities within the islands, but these must have found other modes of expression. The Hebridean Atlantic roundhouses were built by individual small communities. [...] The roundhouse expressed the self-sufficiency of the community, its control of its small pocket of land and its permanence in the face of a hostile environment. Thus there never developed the spatial hierarchies that can be seen so clearly in the arrangement of subsidiary buildings around the central broch towers of the north (Armit 1998: 130-31).

In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries also, there was great diversity in housing, both on the mainland, and in the Western Isles. Once again, environmental factors ensured that in wooded areas, such as parts of Argyll and Knoydart, houses were, at least before the mid-eighteenth century, predominantly of wattle and daub (Gailey 1962: 243-40; Dodgshon 1993a: 422), and roof pitches were often higher in areas less exposed to the wind, to allow for a more effective dispersal of rain water (Sinclair 1953: 37-38). Different types of thatching material were used depending on what was growing locally (cf. NicAoidh 2000[28]).

The construction of the houses that I am looking at in Lewis has parallels in other islands. In previous research (NicAoidh 2000), I identified a number of areas where this type of house could be found: the Western Isles, St. Kilda, Skye, and Tiree. I identified the distinguishing feature of the houses to be the thick, double-skinned, drystone walls (consisting of an inner and an outer wall, with the space between them

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[28] NicAoidh 2000 refers to my unpublished MSc thesis, which was written in Gaelic and submitted under my Gaelic surname. The thesis, entitled '*Taighean nan Eilean Siar, a' toirt a-steach Hiort agus Tiriodh*' ('Thatched Houses of the Western Isles, including St. Kilda and Tiree') examined the available evidence for thatched houses (of a similar construction to those being studied in this thesis) in these areas. In particular it looked at wall construction, roof construction, and the interior of the houses.

packed with earth) with the roof couples resting on the inner wall, leaving a broad outer wall-head. This is a unique style of building, and is distinguishable from most of the mainland thatched houses of the time which had thinner walls and a different method of supporting the roof. Cattle housing was common on each of the islands, as it was throughout Scotland, Wales, and Ireland down to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, and the most basic form of these houses seems to have been the one-roomed byre-dwelling, which housed the cattle and the humans under the same roof with little or no partition between them (Figure 8). It is possible, and perhaps likely, that this form of house was once found on all of these islands, and it survived down to the nineteenth century in many areas, such as in Lewis, Skye and St. Kilda, standing side-by-side with the larger and more developed houses.

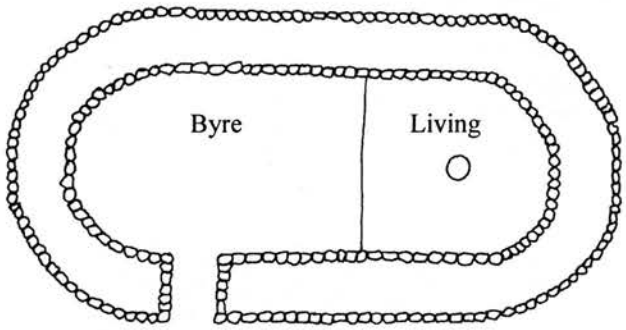

Figure 8: Basic byre-dwelling house plan

Looking closely at the housing in these areas, however, I found that although it was possible to say that this particular type of housing existed on each of these islands at the beginning of the twentieth century, and that therefore these islands made up one distinct typological group, the reality was that at least six distinct housing types could be found within this one area.

In Skye and in the Uists, for example, single-skinned walls become more prominent than their double-skinned counterparts, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Walton 1957; Crawford 1965: 48-51; Walker 1989a: 53-60). In Skye, timber crucks are introduced to support the roof, as was common on the mainland throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Walton 1957; Walker 1989a: 53-60), however this was not the case in North Uist (Crawford 1965:

49), and thus perhaps not in South Uist or Benbecula. In Tiree, the lack of peat on the island meant that coal was introduced very early on and this resulted in the fire being moved from the centre of the floor to the end wall, and the introduction of chimneys, much earlier than in the other islands. Also in Tiree, although the byre-dwelling may have been common at one time, by the second half of the nineteenth century the cattle were being housed in an adjoining byre with a separate door (Figure 9). Likewise, any ancillary buildings such as barns or stables were situated alongside the main living area but were not internally connected to it in any way, with each having its own external door (Boyd 1986).

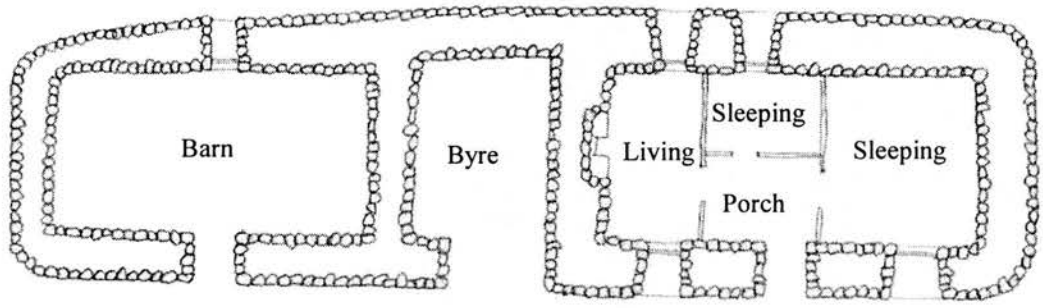

Figure 9: Croft-house, Tiree (after Boyd 1986: 15)

In Barra, recent archaeological excavation has shown that, in all likelihood, animals were commonly housed either in an adjoining byre, as in Tiree, or in a separate byre nearby (Branigan and Merrony 2000; Branigan 2005). On St Kilda, there was a strong external influence on housing which resulted in new houses being built in 1834, through charitable donations, and again in 1860 after a storm destroyed the new dwellings (Harman 1997: 150; MacKenzie 1911). The houses on St. Kilda conformed to the basic one-roomed byre-dwelling, although even in the pre-1834 houses there was a four-foot high stone partition wall between the people and the cattle (MacKenzie 1905: 401). This type of partition was not common on the other islands until much later on. In Lewis, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, the houses were somewhat bigger than those on St. Kilda, and consisted not only of the byre-dwelling but also a number of ancillary rooms which were positioned, not alongside the main byre-dwelling unit as was common in Tiree and on the mainland,

but parallel to it, to the front and the back (Figure 10). This seems to have been the most common layout of houses in Lewis throughout most of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, although there was a certain amount of variation between houses in different districts on the island.

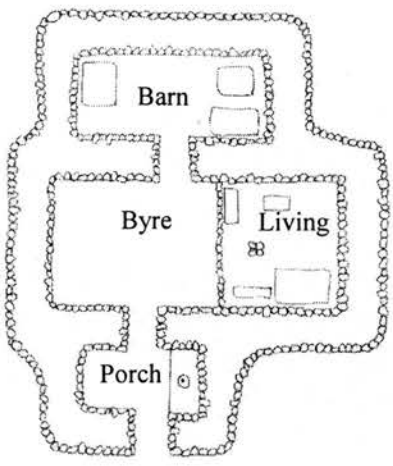

Figure 10: Plan of house on West Side of Lewis, 1860s (after Thomas 1867: 154)

Thus, by the nineteenth century, the houses in these islands had developed such that there was considerable diversity between them. These developments could not have occurred due to environmental pressures alone and must also, therefore, have been influenced by socio-cultural factors.

Conclusion

In discussing the nature of change in vernacular architecture it has been shown that there are two underlying causes for material change, i.e., environmental change and socio-cultural change. These changes are then translated by individuals or groups into motivations for material change, namely necessity and advantage. The process of material change begins with the change itself which can be introduced through diffusion, innovation or invention. The change is then accepted or rejected by the individual and the society and, if successful, integrated into the *genre de vie*. Continuity may be of two forms – conscious, whereby change has been rejected in favour of the status quo, and historical, where change has not been contemplated. I

have also suggested that there are a number of ways in which changes in *genre de vie* can manifest in vernacular architecture and that these changes can be split into four categories: Fabric, Features, Furnishings, and Function. In looking at the architectural history of Lewis and the surrounding area it has been shown that the architecture has changed dramatically from the Neolithic to the Modern period and that there was also significant diversity between the architecture of different areas. This diversity has also been shown to exist in nineteenth and twentieth century housing throughout the Western Isles.

Chapter 4

The Early MacKenzie Period 1610-1783

Introduction

The MacKenzies of Kintail owned Lewis for a period of over two hundred years, between 1610, when Lord Colin MacKenzie bought the island, until 1844, when the island was sold to James Matheson. This chapter looks at housing and settlement in Lewis during the pre-lotting period of the MacKenzie rule, from 1610 until 1783. In 1783, the island fell to Francis Humberston MacKenzie and it was he who first lotted the island, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The later MacKenzie period, from 1783 until 1844, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

To begin with, the chapter will briefly introduce society in the pre-lotting era, looking at the administrative structure of the island at the time, and touching on farming practices. It will also look briefly at the fishing and kelp industries, which contributed to the island's economy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This chapter will then consider the pre-lotting settlement, touching on the layout and position of the settlement, and looking at the method of farming and the nature of the farming community. The chapter will then turn to pre-lotting house, discussing the Function, Features, Fabric, and Furnishings of the houses, and the social, cultural, and environmental influences on the various housing elements.

4.1 Pre-Lotting Society

In 1266, the period of Norse rule in the Hebrides, which had begun in the eighth and ninth centuries CE, ended, as the islands were ceded to Scotland. The MacLeod chiefs of Lewis (claiming descent from the Norse-Scottish Leod) gained practical supremacy over the other Lewis clans (such as the MacAulays and the Morisons) throughout the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, during which the rule of the island changed hands several times between the Earls of Ross, the Stewarts, the

MacDonald Lords of the Isles, and the Crown (MacDonald 1990: 23).[29] Under the MacLeods, the social structure of the island was clan-based with the male population divided into fighting men and labourers who worked the land and provided for the fighting men and chiefs alike (Carmichael 1890: 429; MacKenzie 1919: 154). The labourers, in turn, were given protection by 'the warrior caste' (MacKenzie 1919: 157). In 1598 Lewis was forfeited to the Crown for the failure of its chief to produce proof of ownership, and, in 1610, the island was sold to the MacKenzies of Kintail. The MacKenzies took the name of Seaforth from Loch Seaforth, at the head of which they built their stronghold (MacDonald 2000: 84-86). A new seat, Seaforth Lodge, was built sometime in the late seventeenth century, on the site where Lews Castle now stands, across the bay from Stornoway. The island remained in their possession throughout the period covered in this chapter, under a number of different MacKenzie chiefs, with the exception of a period from 1715 to 1726 during which the Seaforth estates were forfeited to the Crown due to William MacKenzie's support for the Stewarts in exile and his subsequent participation in the 1715 Jacobite rising (Brand 1902: xii, lxiii-lxvii).

The administrative structure of the island in the late eighteenth century consisted of the proprietor; his factor, the ground officers, the tacksmen, the constables, the tenants and the sub-tenants. The factor, also known as Chamberlain, in Gaelic *Siamarlan* (MacAmhlaigh 1980: 2), was answerable only to the proprietor and it was he who was left in charge of the estate in the proprietor's absence (Barlow 1753; Buchanan 1793: 34). The ground officers, in Gaelic *maoir-gruinnd* (Napier 1884: 452) or *maoir fearainn* (MacAmhlaigh 1980: 3), represented the Chamberlain, and there was one officer for each of the four parishes. The tacksmen, in Gaelic *fir taca* or *fir baile* (Geddes 1955: 144), held large tacks of land from the proprietor to whom they paid rent. They, in turn, let out portions of their land to sub-tenants, from whom they collected rent. Other tenants held their lands directly from the proprietor (1718 Rental, cited in Brand 1902: 47-53; 1726 Rental, cited in MacPhail 1916: 313-23; Buchanan 1793: 34). Each township was represented by one or two constables, in Gaelic *constabail baile* (Napier 1884: 213), selected either by the tenants or by the

[29] For more information on this period in Lewis history, see MacBain (1896: 14-21); MacKenzie (1919: 37-53); and MacDonald (1990: 23-32).

estate, whose job it was to liaise with the estates officers and to carry out any decision making within the township, such as the division of peat banks and of arable land, and making sure every tenant did his share of the communal work (GD46/15/260; Napier 1884: 214-16; Carmichael 1890: 390).

In the late eighteenth century, rent consisted of money, meal, butter, and mutton. Tenants and sub-tenants were also required to contribute so many days' labour to either the tacksman or the proprietor. Buchanan (1793: 52) states that in the late eighteenth century this was usually not more than 'eight or ten days in the year'. In the *Old Statistical Account*, written during the last decade of the eighteenth century, the minister of Stornoway informs us that the sub-tenants of that parish provided their tacksman with twelve days' service per year. In Barvas at that time, however, we are informed that 'in place of the statute-labour, every man, from 16 to 60 years of age, pays 1s. 6d' (*OSA* 1797: 272).

Oats, barley and potatoes were the main crops grown at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Potatoes had been introduced in the mid-eighteenth century and had quickly become 'the most useful of all crops' (*OSA* 1797: 249). With regard to husbandry, the *Old Statistical Account* states that in the parish of Barvas, at the end of the eighteenth century, there were 1050 horses, 2670 black-cattle, and 3392 sheep. With 439 families in the parish (ibid.: 267) the average number of horses, cattle, and sheep per household can be calculated as 2, 6, and 8 respectively.[30] The cattle were the most important of all the animals kept. They not only provided the family with milk and other dairy produce, but were bred and sold to provide money for the rent and for the purchase of other articles (MacDonald 1990: 81).

As well as working the land, fishing played an important part in the daily-lives of the people. During most of the eighteenth century, herring fishing was the most prolific, although it suffered a period of decline towards the end of the century as shoals left the Lewis sea lochs and moved eastwards. At the time, it was believed that this was possibly due to over-fishing around Lewis, or due to the 'constant reaping yearly of

[30] MacDonald (1990: 81) calculates the number of cattle per household in the Barvas parish as 9. By my calculation, it should only be 6.

the sea-weed or weir along the coast' which took place as a result of the growing kelp industry (*NSA* 1841: 161; MacDonald 1990: 102-03). In fact, the disappearance of herring around Lewis was not due to human interaction with the sea: it is now known that herring shoals frequently move to new areas, for no obvious reason. This decline in herring fishing led to the seasonal migration of crews to fish in Caithness and on the east coast of Scotland, either crewing their own boats or finding employment as hired-hands (MacDonald 1990: 96, 103-04).

The main source of income in the late eighteenth (and also the early nineteenth) century, however, came from the kelp industry. It is not known when kelp started to be produced in great quantities in Lewis, but from around 1764 onwards the industry grew (Brand 1902: lxxxii) until by the late eighteenth century kelp had succeeded horses and cows as the main export of the Western Isles (Buchanan 1793: 157). The peak of the kelp industry was around 1819-20 after which it began to decline steadily (MacDonald 1990: 88). Kelp-making was an arduous task involving the gathering and burning of seaweed to make calcinated ash which was then exported for the industrial production of iodine and soap among other things (ibid.: 88, 91). Once the seaweed had been cut and dried it was burned in an open kiln which had to be watched over night and day (*NSA* 1841: 134-35). It was an unpleasant job and many islanders were forced into the work. By 1795, and probably before then also, tenants could be fined or evicted if they refused to produce kelp for the proprietor (MacKenzie 1795: Article 12).

Kelp-making took place during the summer months, a time when there was little left over from the previous year's harvest and the present year's harvest was yet to be gathered. Thus people often relied on shellfish gathered during these months to supplement their dwindling food supply. A report from the Barvas ground officer, Mr. Macgregor, in 1821 paints a shocking picture of the life of some of the islanders involved in the kelp industry, and it is likely that conditions such as this also existed in the late eighteenth century:

> Another obstacle, is the want of boats. As the poor people get no fish they cannot keep boats. There is not a merchant in Stornoway that would give them credit for a pint of tar since they got poor, and if I had not given them a piece of

> shore timber to repair their boats, I could never get the kelp shipped [...] I was two days and two nights at Shawbost waiting for shipment of the kelp, and the people along with me, without going to a house, and as I didn't allow the people to go to the ebb as usual, for some shellfish or seaweeds, which is their daily subsistence, the last day they were not able to row their boats nor stand; only for some meal and bread the master of the vessel was giving them, I could not get anything done. What could be expected of people in such a state? (cited in MacDonald 1990: 90).[31]

According to the minister of Stornoway, Rev. John Cameron, the kelp industry had a detrimental effect on the agricultural practices of the people:

> [W]hen thousands are engaged, all the summer season, making kelp, their crofts and lots are neglected, potato fields are overrun with weeds, consequently the return is small, and part of the gain by kelping is lost in their potato crop; their cattle are much neglected; corn fields are destroyed; and the tenants distressed for their rents. Many of the herd boys that should attend the cattle during the summer heats are kelping; many beasts are lost in mossy veins, and fall from rocks, when they run wild during an excessively hot day, - so that in this way, the gain by kelp becomes a loss. The kelping system is thus a great obstacle to agricultural improvement (*NSA* 1841: 135).

The proprietor's interest in kelp had also led to a restriction on the amount of seaweed the islanders were allowed to cut for their own use as fertilizer for their crops (GD46/17/Vol.13; Buchanan 1793: 92-93).

The repeal of the Salt Tax in 1825, and the discovery of alternative and cheaper sources of alkali, led to the eventual demise of the kelp industry before the mid-nineteenth century (Hunter 2000: 73) and the subsequent growth of the fishing industry (MacDonald 1990: 96-97).

4.2 The Pre-Lotting Settlement

> Some of them have their tenements placed more promiscuously. These divide their spots of corn land as they are detached upon the farm, giving each other a proportion according to their respective rents; and that each may have his just share of the benefits of the pasture also, they restrict each other to a proportion of cattle corresponding with the amount of their rents: thus securing to each other, by mutual consent, a share of the produce of their farm, proportionate to their respective rents (Minister of the parish of Lochs, Lewis, 1833, in *NSA* 1841: 167).

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[31] The source of this quote was not referenced by MacDonald and I have been unable to locate the original.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the early nineteenth century pre-lotting settlement in Bragar consisted of small groups of houses, which might usefully be termed 'joint-farms' (Geddes 1949, 1955). These joint-farms were worked in 'runrig', a system of farming whereby the arable land was re-allocated every year (Skene 1890: 370) or every few years (Napier 1884: 17; Geddes 1949: 56), in order that each tenant would have his share of both the best and the worst of the land.[32] A number of joint-farms would make up a township: for example, the 1718 rental shows that there were nine such groups of small-tenants farming the lands of Shawbost (Brand 1902: 47-53). All grazing land was held in common (usually by a whole township) and the amount of stock each tenant was allowed to graze, known as 'souming' was, in Lewis, dependent upon the amount of rent paid (Carmichael 1890: 379, 384). In the *New Statistical Account* for the parish of Barvas, it is stated that 'each tenant is entitled to a souming proportional to his rent, at the rate of a cow with her follower till a year old, 8 sheep, and half a horse for every pound rent' (*NSA* 1841: 148). During the winter, the arable land was also used for grazing (Napier 1884: 17).[33] Certain seasonal tasks also were done in common, for example peat-cutting and ploughing – work which was more easily accomplished by a group of tenants working together (Geddes 1955: 120-21).

In Lewis, these 'joint-farms' were situated around the coast and sea lochs, as can be seen in Map 6 and Map 7 (Chapter 2), where drainage and cultivation were easier (Stevens 1925: 81; Lewis Association 1944: 42). Proximity to the sea would also have been useful for collecting seaweed, which was used as fertilizer along with manure, and provided easy access for fishing or shell-fishing. The scattered nature of the pre-crofting settlement was largely due to the nature of the immediate environment:

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[32] Carmichael (1890: 380) explains that '[a] third of the land under cultivation is thus divided every year. Accordingly, the whole cultivated land of the townland undergoes redivision every three years.' Carmichael also states that, in North Uist, the tenant allocated the worst section of land one year would have first choice of the sections at the next allocation (ibid.).

[33] Walker (1812: 58-59) mentions two other types of tenure – steelbow tenure, where the stock is let to the tenant along with the land, and half-foot (which he says was practised 'in Skye and the neighbouring countries') where the seed was property of the factor or tacksman and the proceeds were split between themselves and the tenant who farmed the land.

> Certainly when we take the earliest estate plans and look at the patchy, broken nature of arable and the marginality of so much hill or water-logged ground in the region, it is easy to see how the geography of environmental opportunity served to group or isolate, to align or constrain, to disperse or concentrate the layout of townships and their associated communities (Dodgshon 1998: 141).[34]

The number of houses varied between joint-farms, however the 1718 Rental shows that of the joint-farms on the West Side, most of them comprised five tenants and that within each joint-farm, in most cases, all members paid the same rent (Brand 1902: 47-53).

The arable land was in close proximity to the houses and, due to the scattered nature of good arable land on the West Side, it is likely that the portions of land allotted to a particular tenant would also have been scattered. Much of the arable land was farmed with the use of lazy-beds, in Gaelic *feannagan*, – strips of land built up with soil and fertilizer, into which the grain, or later potato seed, was sown. Grant (1997: 94) describes the creation of a lazy-bed as follows:

> The manure, or more often the sea-ware which had been brought from the shore and spread out on the grass to decay, was laid in a thick strip on the surface of the growing sward down the centre of what was to be the lazy-bed which had been marked out and was about five feet wide. The ground on each side was then turned over the strip of manure or seaweed, making a sandwich with a nourishing filling of fertilizer and of the decayed vegetation on the original top of the sward. Then another fiannagan [sic] was made parallel to the first so that the earth turned over each of them left a 2-ft. ditch between which provided drainage.

None of the land was enclosed, and boundaries were marked by cutting a furrow in the soil (Carmichael 1890: 380). Cattle were watched constantly between sowing and harvesting, to ensure that none of the crops was damaged: the lack of boundaries between the tenants' plots meant that each tenant was just as much at risk as his neighbour, if any cattle did stray onto the arable land. This was seen by John Walker, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as somewhat of an advantage as each man therefore had an incentive to keep a close eye on his cattle. He described the runrig system as follows:

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[34] It should be noted, however, that Dodgshon (1998: 142) also suggests that such an environment could equally have led to 'a resource base more suited to the independent family than the community.' If this is true, there must also have been some other, non environmental, influences on the layout of the settlements.

> A number of tenants of the same farm, have a common pasture for their cattle; and the arable is divided among them, by ridge and ridge alternately, which each cultivates for his own behoof. This gives them all a common interest in the crop, and, when there was no inclosure, might be of some advantage, in guarding each person's lot of cornfield, against the encroachments of his neighbour's cattle (Walker 1812: 65).

The lack of enclosure may have been partly due to the nature of the soil. Sloping areas of arable land, and land nearest to the coast, would make for better cultivation due to better drainage. In order to allocate each tenant a share of the best soil, he might be allocated portions of land, of various shapes and sizes, throughout the area being farmed. Dodgshon comments that '[i]n the majority of runrig townships, field units were small and irregular in shape, and highly variable in terms of surface quality, making their equal sub-division between tenants extremely difficult, especially where more than a handful were involved' (Dodgshon 1998: 151). Also, the quality of various areas of land might vary from year to year, under different climatic conditions, or due to crop rotation, which may have led to the portions of land being allocated changing from year to year. To enclose each portion of arable one year may have meant removing the enclosures and re-building them elsewhere the following year which would have been extremely time consuming. The complexity of dividing the land and the allocation of rigs is shown in the following passage by James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, who travelled in Lewis in 1803. It also shows that with tenants working in such close proximity, disagreements did occur. Hogg states that the minister of Barvas, Rev. Rev. Donald MacDonald, was kept busy 'distributing justice', because

> although the people are not much given to quarrelling or litigation, their rights in their farms are so confused and interwoven, that it is almost impossible to determine what share belongs to each. Supposing ten tenants possessing a farm, which is common enough, and every 'shot' or division of their arable land to consist of ten or more beds, or ridges, they do not take ridge about, and exchange yearly, nor yet part the produce, but every ridge is parted into as many subdivisions as there are tenants. Into tenths, twentieths, fourths, fifths, etc., everyone managing and reaping his share, so that it would take a man to be master of fractions to be a tenant in Lewis (Hogg 1888: 107-08).

There are differing opinions as to whether farming in runrig, where the land was regularly re-allocated, was beneficial to the preservation of good arable land. It has

been argued that, as tenants were in short-term possession of the land they farmed, there was no incentive for them to try and improve the land as 'a man who might think to improve his land was deterred from effort by the knowledge that his lot would be lost at the next draw' (Murray 1973: 181). Certainly, farming the land in runrig may not have produced as much, or as good quality, produce as some other method of farming. Carmichael, however, seems to suggest the opposite, stating that much care was taken in the division of land and that when reclaiming moorland through the use of lazy-beds, '[t]he people mutually encourage one another to plant as much of this ground as possible' (Carmichael 1890: 393, 281). John Walker, quoted above, stated that the runrig system gave tenants a 'common interest in the crop', and Geddes (1955: 124) also states that '[c]ommon interest was assured, and there was mutual support in distress or sickness'. Carmichael (1890: 393) viewed those tenants who farmed in runrig as being the 'most comfortable in North Uist, and, accordingly, in the Outer Hebrides'. He was also of the opinion that the tenant who worked in runrig had a considerable advantage over the tenant who worked on a croft:

> Obviously the man who is restricted to his croft has fewer advantages than the man who, together with his croft, has his share of the *Machair*, and still fewer advantages than the man who has, rig for rig with his neighbours, the run of the various soils of his townland (Carmichael 1890: 380).

The question of antiquity in relation to runrig in the western Highlands and Islands has been covered extensively by Dodgshon (1993a, 1993b, 1998). He proposes that far from being an archaic form of farming as has been supposed by many authors in the past (for example, Carmichael 1890), runrig was in fact of a more recent, possibly late-Medieval, origin (Dodgshon 1993b: 384). He points to cartographic and field evidence for an earlier form of settlement holding, based on enclosures, which pre-dates runrig, and offers explanations for the appearance, or development, of the open-field system as being related to the growth of feudalism in the area, from the late thirteenth century onwards, and the introduction of a 'feudalized system of landholding' (Dodgshon 1993b: 384):

> The central characteristic of such a system was the fixed assessment of arable using land units like the oxgate or husbandland. This created a basic antimony [sic, presumably 'antinomy'] between, on the one hand, the aggregation of holdings into large blocks of assessment (= townships) and, on the other, the

> need to disaggregate these assessments into individual holdings, a need guided by the simple but potent fact that each land unit's share of the whole was seen as equal in both extent and value. The way communities resolved this problem produced runrig townships (Dodgshon 1993b: 384).

Although it is outwith the remit of this thesis to look in any detail at the origins and relative antiquity of runrig, Dodgshon does bring up a number of interesting points, relating to the purpose and nature of the pre-lotting settlement that are worthy of discussion here.

In Dodgshon's opinion, the belief, held by many nineteenth and twentieth century writers on the subject, that the 'annual reallocation of land or strips between members of the farming or township community was driven by a socially based desire to maintain an absolute equality between all landholders as a matter of principle', is no more than assumption based on misconception, and consideration must be given to the 'tenurial or agrarian reasons for reallocation' (Dodgshon 1998: 124). However, while suggesting, on one hand, that tenurial assessment *may* have 'encouraged greater nucleation and co-ordination in the ordering of the township and its farming practice *in toto*, providing a more dispersed or dis-aggregated system with a greater degree of unity than it had hitherto possessed' (ibid.: 149), he also states that the tenurial assessments in the west Highlands and in the Hebrides were generally not used 'to lay out townships' as was the case in the Lowlands (ibid.: 144), thus suggesting that the township layout had more to do with environmental and cultural issues. His assertion (ibid.: 151) that the land was 'highly variable in terms of surface quality' also suggests that there was adequate reason to divide and re-allocate land on a regular basis.

Discussing the origins of runrig settlements, Dodgshon disputes the supposition that they may 'derive their character from the fact that the farmers around whom they were organised *necessarily* shared the tasks of exploiting resources together, and that it is this need for sharing that generates their communal character', commenting that 'there is little to suggest that this sharing underpinned runrig as a system of co-operative effort' (Dodgshon 1998: 142). He continues,

> it was hardly a system suffused with the spirit of a 'primitive communism' that some have attached to it. If it had developed out of such a spirit, then it had clearly abandoned some cherished notions. Indeed, one is inclined to ask why, given the equality of rent per unit of land assessment, tenants did not simply farm in common and then divide the product as they did the rent (Dodgshon 1998: 152-53).

Dodgshon also suggests that contemporary sources imply that 'the communal working of the land and runrig were not compatible concepts', and draws on the evidence presented by Carmichael (1890) to conclude that 'runrig tenants did not even work the soil together before dividing out the year's arable into strips' (Dodgshon 1998: 143).

Dodgshon thus perceives the runrig method of farming as harbouring very individualistic tendencies and suggests that far from having its origins in a more communal system of landholding, in fact, runrig may have 'incorporated earlier notions about private property [...] hence its curious compromise between managing some resources and activities together, but allowing each tenant to feel associated with particular strips, albeit just for the growing season' (Dodgshon 1998: 153). While he may be correct in his suggestion, his interpretation of the runrig system as being a 'curious compromise' between communalism and individualism seems to me to be negating some of the practical and cultural aspects involved.

I suggest that, regardless of the origins of the runrig system, there is evidence that the runrig system supported a communal way of living and farming, based on communal activities which survived the introduction of crofting and were still widely practised well into the twentieth century.

Dodgshon's main argument seems to be that as land was re-allocated every year, and since the whole area was not ploughed in common, runrig could not be considered as a method of farming in which the land was worked in common. For reasons outlined below, I suggest that the land was, in effect, worked in common, and that other communal activities of the community present a strong case for it being considered a method of farming and of living 'in community'.

There were 90 ploughs in the Barvas parish at the end of the eighteenth century, each of which was drawn 'by four small horses' (*OSA* 1797: 266).[35] The ploughs were wooden and took at least two, if not four, men to work them (Hogg 1888: 114-15; Geddes 1955: 120; Murray 1973: 185; Grant 1997: 101). If each tenant had, on average, only two horses, as suggested above, it would be necessary for tenants to combine forces, both manpower and horsepower, for ploughing. Due to the stony nature of the ground, in many areas land was tilled, not with the plough, but with the hand spade and the *caschrom*, a type of foot plough. It may have seemed primitive to contemporary writers (e.g. *NAS* 1841: 148), but it was a much more effective method of tilling stony ground and, according to Murray (1973: 185), 'twelve men working in line could dig an acre a day.' It is very likely that in most townships or farms there would have been areas of arable land that were ploughable, and areas that were not. It is unclear how much of the arable land in Bragar at that time would have been tilled using the plough, although the minister of Barvas mentions that, in the late eighteenth century '[t]he district called Claddoch [the West Side] is light, thin, spouty ground, and in many places so full of stones, that the plough cannot go through it' (*OSA* 1797: 264). However, the fact that there were ninety ploughs in the Barvas parish in the late eighteenth century suggests that there was probably one plough in every joint-farm (Geddes 1955: 120).[36] Therefore some portions of land would have been ploughed by tenants working together, albeit on a particular tenant's plot of land. Where land was tilled with the spade or *caschrom*, tenants would be working side by side, much as they would have had they been tilling the whole area in common. Harvesting may have been done in common and peat cutting and fishing certainly would have.

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[35] In Lewis, horses, cattle, and sheep were smaller than they were on the mainland (*OSA* 1797: 267).

[36] Interestingly, by 1836, it was stated that '[t]he minister's plough is the only one in the parish' (*NSA* 1841: 148). While it is possible that the minister was of the opinion that his own plough was the only plough in Barvas worthy of the name, thereby discounting all others, he continues, 'except we admit as such three or four machines so called, having but one handle, which the ploughman manages with both hands, standing sideways' (ibid.). This suggests that there perhaps was only one plough in the parish, to the minister's knowledge at least. Also of note is the decrease in the number of horses in the parish from 1050 in the late eighteenth century (*OSA* 1797: 266), to 549 in 1883 (Napier 1884: 1093). Both sets of figures suggest that the arable land of the pre-lotting settlement was much more easily ploughable than that of either the first or second lotting.

There is also evidence to suggest that some areas of land *were* tilled and harvested in common. Describing runrig practices still in operation in the late nineteenth century in North Uist, Carmichael (1890: 381) states that

> [o]ccasionally and for limited bits of ground, the people till, sow, and reap in common, and divide the produce into shares (Rainn, Ranntaichean) and draw lots. This too is called Comachadh, promiscuous. The system was not uncommon in the past, though now nearly obsolete.

In addition, he points out that although each tenant has his own share of land which is re-allocated every three years, the system of allocation was fair, and that land was set aside to be farmed for the poor (Carmichael 1890: 381). Thomas (1867: 157) also notes that land was sometimes sown in common, stating that 'each patch was equally divided among them all, while occasionally the difficulty of partition rendered it necessary to sow in common, and divide the produce'.

This sense of community and mutual cooperation is also shown by the practice, still evident to some extent today (Inf. E), of all tenants stopping work in the event of a death in the township (or joint-farm) until the burial had taken place (Carmichael 1890: 393; Ferguson 2003: 148). A similar practice, which existed well into the twentieth century, was that of the whole township stopping work at six o' clock, not only on a Saturday night before church on Sunday, but during the week when the bell sounded for the weekly Church meetings. Those not attending the meeting would also stop work, so that those attending the meeting would not be behind the rest in their croft work (Inf. F). One other practice which, again, survived down to the twentieth century, which probably existed pre-crofting, was that if a tenant had finished his croft-work and a neighbour was still working, he would go and help the neighbour. All tenants would participate in this until everyone's croft-work was finished (Inf. F).

Dodgshon is also of the opinion that the pre-crofting settlements were not as static as we might assume and that, prior to crofting, 'many settlements may have been subject to a continuous process of change, with regular cycles of destruction and renewal as tenants exploited some of the nutrients locked up in turf walls, roof turf and thatch, as they carried away scarce roof timbers, doors and partitions, and rebuilt

houses destroyed in feuds' (Dodgshon 1993a: 424). As discussed in Chapter 2, the use of turf as a building material may have been widespread during the Medieval and Post-Medieval period. We do not know whether the dismantling of turf houses was primarily to use the turf as fertilizer or whether this was just a by-product of turf construction, but there is certainly evidence for this practice (cf. Dodgshon 1993a: 422). Although a number of studies in the past (such as Gailey 1960, 1962; Fairhurst 1960; Crawford 1965, 1983; and Fairhurst and Dunbar 1971) have shown the variety of pre-crofting settlements over time and space, further study would be necessary in order to determine the pre-crofting background to any one site. There is little evidence to find on the ground, however, even with archaeological survey, as perishable materials disappear very quickly – a turf house can leave no trace within fifty years of being dismantled (Estyn Evans 1969; Banks and Atkinson 2000).[37]

The pre-crofting settlements and communities that existed at the end of the nineteenth century developed under a variety of social, cultural, and environmental influences which were constantly changing. For each separate influence there would have been a number of possible solutions, each of which would have to take into account other, constantly changing, influences. This continuous process of introduction, acceptance, elimination, and integration, described in Chapter 3, led eventually to the pre-crofting settlements and communities that existed just prior to the first lotting.

4.3 The Pre-Lotting Settlement in Bragar

In Bragar, the early nineteenth century pre-lotting settlement was predominantly located close to the sea or one of the sea lochs, Loch Ordais or Loch Arnol (see Map 6 and Map 7). As discussed in Chapter 2, the pre-lotting settlement corresponds to the houses of Phase 1. Only a few houses from this period remain and most are isolated ruins, except at Gàsig in North Bragar where two structures stand close together. One of these structures consists of two houses built back to back. Thomas

[37] See Banks and Atkinson (2000) for a discussion of the Bragar Townships Project which was 'established to deal with the problem of locating hidden (ie Medieval in this context) rural settlements in the Highlands' using geophysical survey and phosphate analysis.

(1867: 156-57) describes this practice of building houses together, sharing common walls, using the term '*creaga*', which he suggests may have come from the now obsolete word, '*gragan*', meaning 'village' (Dwelly 1993: 520). MacLennan's Gaelic dictionary (1925: 104), however, lists the word '*creaga*' itself as meaning 'a small hamlet' and suggests it may have come from the Old Norse 'kriki' meaning 'a nook'. He also notes that it was specifically a Lewis term (ibid.: 104). Carmichael (1890: 392) suggests a number of Gaelic terms for groups of houses, including '*creaga*', writing that '[t]he houses of the tenants form a cluster (*Gnigne*, *Grigne*, *Griogsa*, *Creaga*, *Carigean*).' Carmichael, however, makes no explicit mention of the houses having common walls. Thomas describes the *creaga* as belonging to the pre-lotting runrig settlements, where 'the tenants of the same farm dwelt in an agglomerated heap of cottages' (Thomas 1867: 156). He also notes that '[a] cluster of cottages would constitute a creaga, provided they had the land in common' (ibid.: 157). He suggests that the *creaga* often consisted of more than two houses, '[a] cluster of cottages', however he also uses the term to describe buildings consisting of only two houses built together with an adjoining wall or walls (ibid.: 157). In Bragar, I have heard informants use the phrase '*taigh creaga*', or perhaps '*taigh creige*' (*taigh* meaning 'house'), to describe houses that were built together in this way. However, I have been unable to determine its origins. The term *creaga* itself, however, is still in common usage in Lewis, and is described in MacLeod (2005: 63) as a 'hamlet' or 'village'. MacLeod (2005: 63) adds that '*An Creaga Shuas*' meant 'upper end of village' while '*An Creaga Shìos*' meant 'lower end of village'. The term is used in Lewis today in phrases such as '*a's a' chreaga againne*' ('in our neighbourhood', Dr. Finlay MacLeod, pers. comm.) and '*dè an creag às a bheil thu?*' ('what '*creaga*' are you from?', Inf. F). It is therefore possible that the 'joint-farm' of the pre-lotting settlements were called, in Gaelic, '*creaga*', and that '*taigh creaga*' was the term used when referring to any one house in the *creaga* or, more specifically, to any house that had at least one other house adjoining it.

Two of the surviving ruins from Phase 1 and Phase 2 consist of two houses built together with an adjoining wall (G(b) and TnG). Interestingly, however, just to the south of the house at the head of Loch Ordais (TBL), lies the ruin of a much larger

building. Only two sides of this building now remain standing; most of it was destroyed in the 1940s when sewage works were carried out in the area (Inf. G). Informants tell me that, in their youth, the many walls of this building all stood to a height of around one metre, so that the appearance of the structure was that of a maze (Inf. F, Inf. G). Local tradition has it that three families lived in the building, which had only one exterior entrance. One informant remembered hearing a story about the rotation of hosting the New Year festivities amongst the various families that lived there (Inf. F).[38] It is likely that, pre-lotting, houses were built together to reduce the amount of arable land taken up by housing, and also to reduce the amount of work involved in the house-building process and the amount of stone needed. However, there were also instances of two houses being built back-to-back, with adjoining walls, post-lotting (such as house 35, where the adjoining house has unfortunately been demolished). This may have been to conserve land or just for convenience. In some instances a family member may have built another house as an addition to the existing one as a home for his extended family. This will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

4.4 The Pre-Lotting Houses

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the earliest published sources that contain detailed information about houses in Lewis are articles written by Thomas (1867) and Mitchell (1880), who conducted research on the island in the mid-nineteenth century. Although some of the ministers writing for the *Old* and *New Statistical Account* (*OSA* 1797; *NSA* 1841) mention housing on the island, along with some late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers, such as Joseph Mitchell (1883), none of the accounts provide a comprehensive or detailed description. The written evidence for the pre-lotting houses (Phase 1), and also for the houses of the first lotting (Phase 2), is therefore scanty at best.

[38] One old man refused to host the celebrations one year and, because of this, a song was written about him (Inf. F).

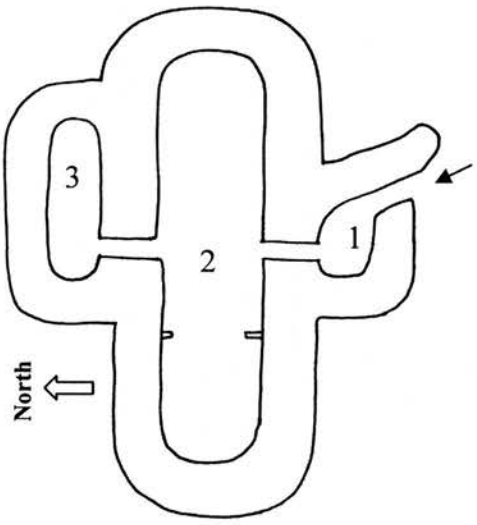
The physical remains for the Phase 1 and 2 houses provide evidence for the layout of these earlier houses and for wall construction and materials, and suggest that the layout and construction of the houses did not vary considerably between the two phases. It is therefore useful, due to the small sample of houses in each phase, to consider the Phase 1 and 2 houses together. When considered along with contemporary accounts of life in the Western Highlands and Islands in general, such as is found in the works of Martin (1703) and Buchanan (1793), a fairly accurate picture of the early nineteenth century houses, both pre-lotting and first-lotting, can be constructed.

4.4.1 Function

The Function of the house refers to the number of units in the house, their size, their type, their use, and their layout. I use the word 'unit' rather than 'room' because 'room' suggests an enclosed area of space within a building, whereas it is perhaps easier to view the byre-dwelling area of the house not as one 'room' containing different spaces for different functions, but as a unit of space which, as time progresses, becomes divided into a number of 'rooms', each with their own characteristics and functions.

From the existing ruins of the Phase 1 and 2 houses, we can see that each house consisted of at least three units (see Plan 1). The largest unit was the byre-dwelling unit, consisting of the living space, *aig an teine* (at the fire), for the people at the upper end (*an ceann shuas*), and the byre, *am bàthach*, for the cattle and hens at the lower end (*an ceann shìos*). Most houses were built on a slight slope, with the byre in the lower end and the living area in the upper end, in order to aid in the drainage of the liquid manure from the byre and to prevent it from percolating through to the living area. This will be discussed further below. In the Phase 1 and 2 houses the cattle seem to have taken up two-thirds of the byre-dwelling unit, with the people living in the remaining one-third. The hearth was in the centre of the living area. There was no partition between the byre and the living area, other than perhaps 'simply a line of rough stones' (Mitchell 1880: 51). Plan 1 shows the position of two upright stones placed in the ground in the byre-dwelling unit. Most likely, this

represents where the byre met the living area. In most houses however, the byre floor was lower than the floor of the living area which resulted in a step between the two. This will be discussed in more detail below.



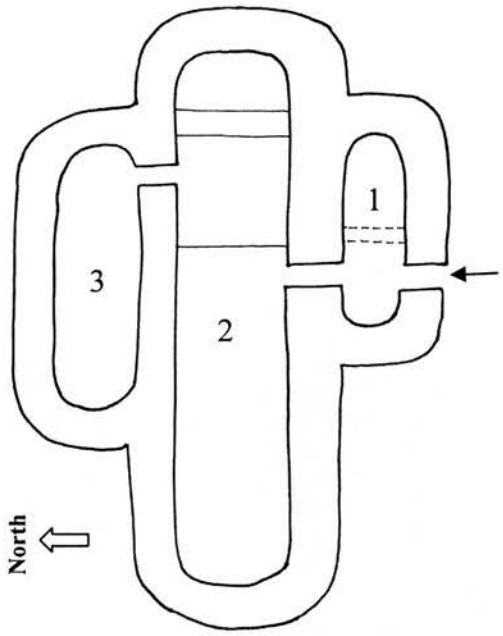
Phase 2

1. *fosglan* (porch)
2. byre-dwelling
3. barn

Plan 1: *Taigh na Sràide bho Thuath* (c), North Bragar (1:250)[39]

On one side of the byre-dwelling unit, was the *fosglan*, which may be loosely translated as 'porch', through which the house was entered. In the *fosglan*, Thomas (1867: 155) comments that there was often a hand quern, for grinding grain, and that there was space also for the horse to be accommodated during bad weather. However, a comparison of the house plans from Phases 1 and 2, with those in Phase 3, which were built during the second lotting, between 1849 and 1851, shows that the *fosglan* seems to have increased in size between the first and the second lotting (Plan 2). The houses that Thomas and Mitchell examined would have belonged in Phase 3, and the *fosglan* would therefore have been big enough to house a quern and also a horse. The *fosglan* in the Phase 1 and 2 houses may have been big enough to house a quern but were certainly not big enough to house even a small horse. The differences between the Phase 2 and Phase 3 houses will be discussed in Chapter 6.

[39] On all plans, a solid black arrow indicates the primary point of entry to the house.



Phase 3

1. *fosglan* (porch)
2. byre-dwelling
3. barn

Plan 2: House 27(b), South Bragar (1:250)

To the other side of the byre-dwelling unit was the barn, *an sabhal*, where grain would have been threshed, winnowed, and stored, along with the potatoes and some hay for the cattle. There was usually a smallish hole (*toll-fasgnaidh* – winnowing hole), or a small door, in the base of the back wall of the barn, which would be opened during winnowing. With the other doors in the house open, a through draught would be created that would aid the process. Thomas (1867: 156) also notes that, in his time, the barn was 'commonly the sleeping-place of the grown-up young people'. This may have been the case in the earlier houses if there was a large family, particularly given the generally small size of the living area. These units were all roofed separately. Where units joined, the roof couples would rest on either side of the partition wall (see below). Although most of the units would have been roofed in parallel, the roofs of any additional rooms may have lain perpendicular to the rest.

It should be noted that some of the later houses in Bragar had a separate barn, such as house 19(a) and house 32 (Inf. E, Inf. F), and that separate barns were common by the late nineteenth century in some other areas of Lewis, such as such as Calbost in the district of Lochs (Figure 11; Inf. H). All of the Phase 1 and 2 houses in Bragar,

however, and most of the later houses in the township, had barns attached to the byre-dwelling unit.

Figure 11: House (foreground) and separate barn (background) in Calbost, Lochs, Lewis

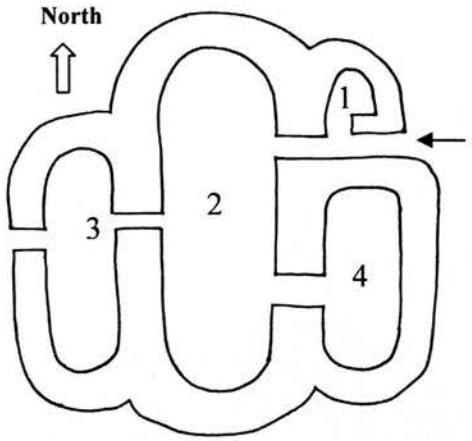
(Photograph taken by the author, 2002)

The house was entered through the *fosglan*, which led into the byre-end of the byre-dwelling unit. The inhabitants then had to walk through the byre to get to the living-end of the house. The physical evidence shows that, in most of the Phase 1 and 2 houses, the barn was also entered through the byre-end of the house.

Some of the Phase 1 and 2 houses also had another unit which was entered from the living area (see Plan 3 and Plan 4). It was situated either next to the *fosglan* (Plan 3), or at the head of the living end running perpendicular to it (Plan 4). This extra unit was known as the *taigh uaraich* (MacLeòid 1960: 338), or *taigh uachdarach* (Sinclair 1953: 29), both meaning 'upper room', although MacDonald (1990: 61) writes it as *taigh-fhuaraich*, 'cold', or 'cooling room'. All three authors, however, agree that this unit provided space for storing food and clothing, and 'could hold one

or two beds' (MacDonald 1990: 61). In Lewis, today, '*taigh-fhuaraich*' seems to be the most commonly used term for this room and it is described as a 'cold room' (Inf. F, Inf. I, Dr. Finlay MacLeod pers. comm.). Thomas (1867: 157) uses the term *cùil-ghast*, which he translates as 'locked-end' (properly *cùil-ghlaiste*), when talking about the unit that is situated at the top end of the living area – in his case, the unit was a barn. The term '*cùlaist*' is a derivative of '*cùil-ghlaiste*', and is used today, in some areas of Lewis (for example in the Lochs district) to mean the room next to the living area which houses the beds (i.e. the main bedroom) and which has also become the 'good room' in the house. In other areas of Lewis, such as in Bragar, this room is known as '*uachdar an taighe*' ('the upper end of the house'), although it was also just called '*an rùm*' ('the room') (Inf. I). This division of the house will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

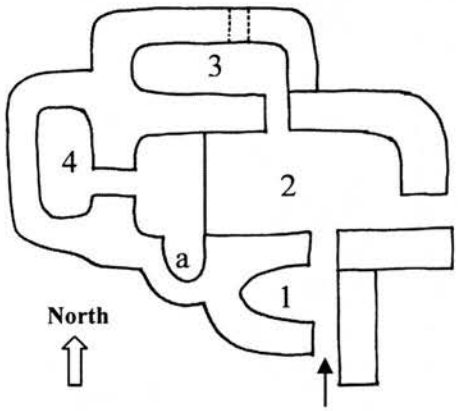
At least two of the houses measured had an extra unit in each of these positions (TCMR & TnG). In one of the two houses, *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh* (Plan 5), MacLeòid (1960; 339-41) suggests that the unit at the top of the living area was in fact a kiln (*àth*). There is also evidence, in this house, of another unit, next to this one, which MacLeòid suggests may have been a *taigh-falaich*, or 'hidden room', accessible only from the kiln, the inference being that the kiln may also have been used as an illicit still (*taigh-staile*), whose produce could have been kept hidden in the *taigh-falaich*. There is no surviving physical evidence for this unit having been a kiln. In particular, there is no evidence of a horizontal flue, through which the heat of the fire would have been conveyed (Figure 12). However, as MacLeòid obtained much of the information about this particular house from local oral tradition, it is possible that there was once a flue in the house, and that the evidence has simply deteriorated over the years.



Phase 1

1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
3. barn
4. *taigh-fhuaraich*

Plan 3: *Taigh Bhaile Loch*, South Bragar (1:250)

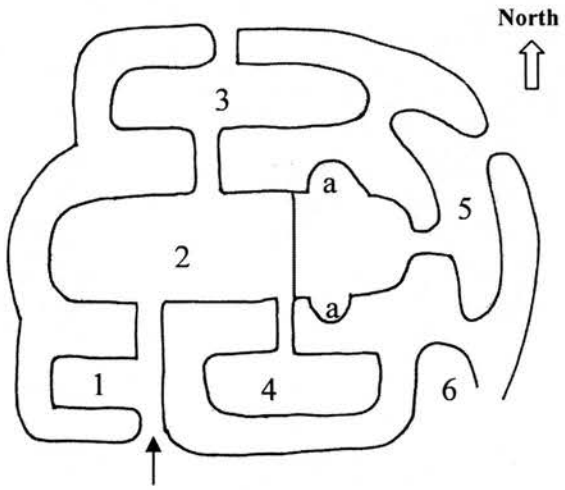


Phase 1

1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
3. barn
4. *taigh-fhuaraich*

a. *crùb* (wall-bed)

Plan 4: *Taigh na Banntraich*, South Bragar (1:250)



Phase 1

1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
3. barn
4. *taigh-fhuaraich*
5. *àth/taigh-staile* (kiln/still)
6. *taigh-falaich* (hidden room)

a. *crùb* (wall-bed)

Plan 5: *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh*, South Bragar (1:250)

Figure 12: The remains of a kiln in the barn of a house in Aird Dhail, Ness, Lewis.

(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

4.4.2 Features

The Features of the house consist of the hearth, the doors, and the windows.

4.4.2.1 The Hearth

> At a convenient point, about the centre of the part now reached, is the fire; and from the rough, undressed, soot-begrimed rafters above, there hangs a rope or bit of chain, on which the pot is suspended (Mitchell 1880: 51).

The hearth was on the floor in the centre of the living area. The fuel used was peat, which was cut annually from the peat-banks on the moor and stored in stacks outside the house.

The hearth was the centre of the house in many respects. It provided warmth for the family and the animals that lived in the house, it provided light, it was used for cooking, for drying clothes, for curing meat and fish, and it kept the fabric of the building dry. The family sat round the fire, and it was round the fire that the *cèilidh*

(gathering) was held in the evening, where visitors arrived and stories were told and songs were sung. This area of the house – the living area – even took its name from the fire, '*aig an teine*' ('at the fire').

Reports from the twentieth century suggest that in some houses the hearth sat directly on the floor, 'devoid of any kind of masonry or even anything to mark its place' (Roussell 1934: 16). In other houses, the fire sat on a hearth stone – '*leac an teinntein*' (MacLeòid 1960: 336), or '*clach an teinntein*' (Walker 1989a: 56). There were also houses which had a 'circular hearth, built of stones with clay between, and raised a few inches' (Geddes 1955: 82).

Above the central hearth, hanging from a cross-beam in the roof or from the ridge-pole was the *slabhraidh* – the rope or chain from which pots could be hung above the fire (Mitchell 1880: 51; Fenton 1981: 17; MacDonald 1990: 59). There were also wooden *slabhraidhean* (Buchanan 1793: 111-12; Grant 1997: 195) although they do not appear to have been as common as those made of iron (Fenton 1981: 17-18).

There was no chimney in these early houses. It is also likely that, in the Phase 1 and 2 houses, there was no smoke-hole in the ridge of the roof as was common in some of the later houses. Instead, both Thomas and Mitchell describe the presence of 'two holes, about a foot square, in and at the bottom of the thatch' (Thomas 1867: 155).[40]

4.4.2.2 Doors

> The door is very low – sometimes barely five feet high. It is commonly made of undressed wood, but I have seen large straw mats used as doors, and I have also seen doors made of a cow's skin stretched on a rough wooden frame (Mitchell 1880: 54).

Mitchell was describing houses he had seen in Lewis in the mid-nineteenth century and it is likely that the early nineteenth century houses also had low doorways, and that the doors were constructed of wood, straw matting or wooden framing covered with cows' skin. It is also likely that the main entrance door was rarely closed and it was almost certainly never locked. In Martin's time, at the end of the seventeenth

[40] For more information about the central hearth in Hebridean houses see NicAoidh (2000).

century, the door was always open, and there was a tradition of placing a 'rod' across the open doorway in order to signal to others that they were not to enter:

> It hath been an ancient Custom in these Isles, and still continues, when any number of Men retire into an House, either to Discourse of serious Business, or to pass some time in drinking; upon these occasions the door of the House stands open, and a Rod is put cross the same, which is understood to be a sign to all Persons without distinction not to approach; and if any should be so rude as to take up this Rod, and come in uncalled, he is sure to be no welcome Guest; for this is accounted such an affront to the Company, that they are bound in honour to resent it; and the Person offending, may come to have his Head broken, if he do not meet with a harsher reception (Martin 1703: 107).

It is not clear whether Martin is talking only of the houses of the elite in this description, however Nicolson (1930: 258), in his *History of Skye*, also mentions such a practice being common in the first half of the eighteenth-century and attributes it to their belief that locking a door showed mistrust in your neighbours. It is from this belief, he suggests, that the proverb '*cho mosach ris a' ghlais*' ('as inhospitable as the lock') stems. He describes how a 'whittled wand' was placed across the door whenever privacy was needed (ibid.: 258). This was the *maide-doicheallach*, or *maide-doichill*, the 'stick of inhospitality' (Dwelly 1993: 623). According to Dwelly (ibid.: 623), the *maide-doichill* was a '*stick placed across a doorway instead of closing the door, when people were dining.* No one entered when they saw it up.' Buchanan (1793: 105-06), writing at the end of the eighteenth century, does not mention this practice but does mention that the people shut their doors at meal-times, a practice which he struggles to explain:

> In time of eating these poor meals, their doors are generally shut, and few people chuse to enter when they find them shut. It is difficult to account for this general custom among a people so universally hospitable. They can assign no reason for this churlish piece of conduct but custom. I suppose it took its origin from the times that that country, as well all Scotland, was infested by a set of robbers called *Cearnachs*, who went about in bands fully armed, and would force their way into any house where they supposed any meat could be found, and generally took it by force. Probably the impression of those practices remained on the minds of succeeding generations; and that practice originating in necessity, obtained the force of a custom, and continued long after that necessity ceased.

4.4.2.3 Windows

> There is no glazed window. Nay – there is frequently not even a hole in the wall for the admission of light. The absence of this is very general in the old Lewis house of the type I am describing. Such light as gains admission enters by the door, or through one or two small holes in the eaves of the roof at the top of the wall, or through chinks from deficiencies in the construction of the roof (Mitchell 1880: 54).

There were no windows in these early houses, the only openings being the door, and the aforementioned holes at the base of the thatch.

4.4.3 Fabric

The Fabric of the house consists of the walls, the roof, and the floor.

4.4.3.1 The Walls

> [T]he walls, rounded at the angles, are from 5 feet to 7 feet in thickness, or they may be considered as two walls, with the interspace filled in with rubbish; and the effect of this great thickness is, that the roof rests on the inner edge, leaving a broad terrace on the top (Thomas 1867: 155).

The walls of the Phase 1 and 2 houses were of a double-skinned dry-stone construction, consisting of an inner and an outer wall of stone – un-hewn and un-mortared – with the space between them filled with what seems to have been a mixture of peat, earth, clay, and small stones. There are a number of Gaelic terms for this 'wall-hearting', however those most commonly used in Lewis seem to be '*udabac*' and '*ùireabac*' It is likely that this hearting material consisted mainly of the topsoil excavated from the site of the house prior to construction (Holden 2004: 39-40). It is also likely that they would have had a topcoat of clay at the top of the walls, as Holden (2004: 40) discovered in a number of the houses in Arnol, presumably to prevent moisture percolating into the hearting.[41]

The walls were very thick due to this double-skinned construction and of the forty-one houses I measured in Bragar, all had a wall thickness of between one and two metres; most were wider than 1.3 metres with many over 1.5 metres. The roof couples rested on the inner wall, and this left a broad outer wall-head, called the

[41] For a more detailed discussion of the wall construction and materials see Walker and McGregor (1996), NicAoidh (2000), and Holden (2004).

tobhta. In order to reach the *tobhta*, a series of projecting stones (usually between three and five) were sometimes built into the outer wall to form a stair (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Projecting stone steps to the *tobhta* in house 24, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

When Mitchell visited Lewis in the mid-nineteenth century he found that '[i]n one case the public footpath to a neighbouring township led me over the end of one of these houses, provision being made for getting up and down by stones or steps projecting from the wall' (Mitchell 1880: 53). Not all of the later houses had such a stair, however, and there is no surviving physical evidence for a stair in any of the Phase 1 and 2 houses. Most of the Phase 1 and 2 remains, however, have very low walls, and we can therefore only speculate as to how common stairs of this kind were in the earlier houses.

The walls were rounded at the ends of the house, rather than squared (this can be seen from the physical evidence of the Phase 1 and 2 houses, and is present in many of the later houses), and it is likely that the walls of all the Phase 1 and 2 houses had

a distinct batter to them (the outer wall sloping inwards towards the top of the wall), as did many of the later houses. This meant that the walls were generally thicker at the base than they were at the wall-head (Figure 14). A discussion of the origins of this type of wall construction can be found in both NicAoidh (2000) and Kissling (1943, 1944).

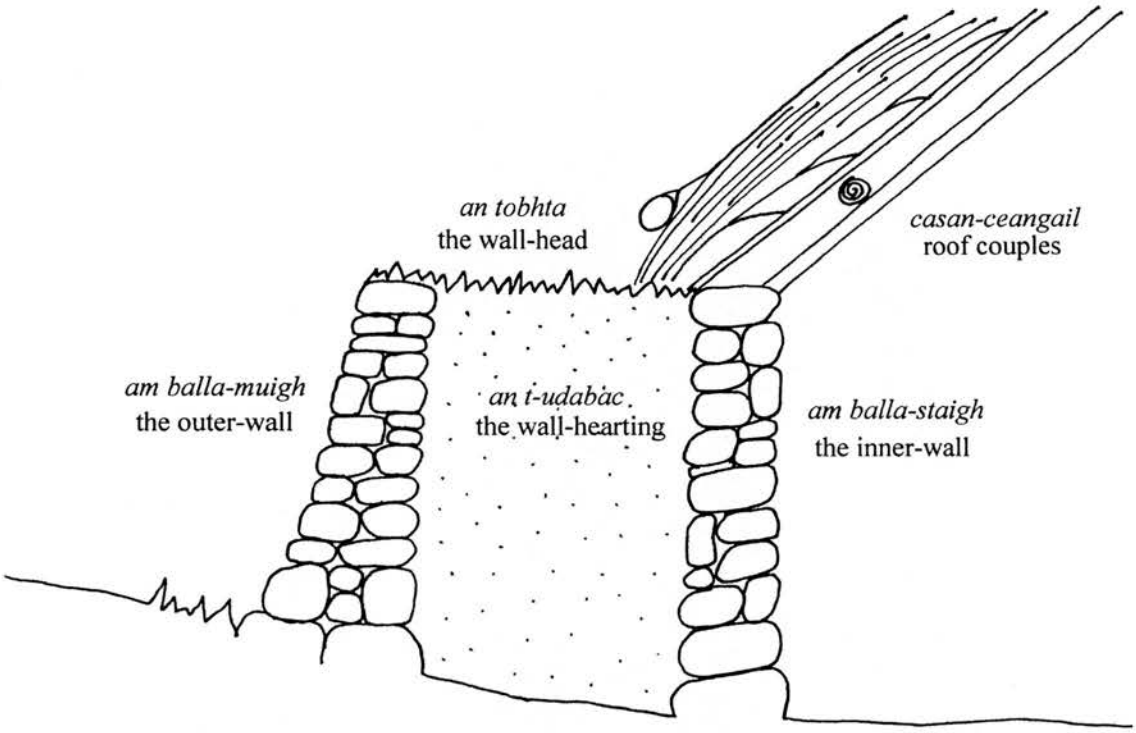


Figure 14: Wall Construction (1:100)

There has been much debate within the study of medieval or later rural settlement in the Highlands, as to the nature and distribution (in time and place) of turf houses (Allen 1979; Dodgshon 1993a; Banks and Atkinson 2000). There is certainly evidence for houses built of turf and of stone and turf in Lewis and in other parts of the Highlands and Western Isles, as discussed in Chapter 3. Of the Phase 1 and 2 houses, four of them (*Taigh Bhaile Loch*, *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh*, *Taigh nan Gobhaichean*, and *Taigh na Banntraich*) stand to a height of around one meter, and may be presumed to have been of a double-skinned dry-stone construction. The walls of the remaining four houses are very low to the ground and it is possible that

the upper part of the walls of these houses was of a turf, or a stone and turf, construction.

4.4.3.2 The Roof

> [T]he couples may be undressed arms of trees bound together with straw or heather ropes; other branches or sticks are laid longitudinally on these; turfs and then straw is loosely piled thereon, and kept down by straw ropes, to which stones are tied (Thomas 1867: 160).

The roofs of the houses consisted of timber (*fiodh*), turf (*sgrathan*), thatch (*tughadh*), ropes (*sìomanan*), and stones used as anchors (*acraichean*). As Lewis is virtually treeless, in this early period all the timber for roof construction came from driftwood found on the sea-shore, from ship wrecks, and from the remains of trees found in peat-bogs (MacDonald 1990: 57; Walker and McGregor 1996). The roof couples (*na ceangail*) sat on the inner wall, and the roof was rounded and hipped at each end, following the line of the walls. There were no gables. On top of the couples on either side of the roof were placed one or two sets of purlins (*taobhanan*), running parallel to the wall-head, and on top of these were laid side-timbers (*cabair*) which would form a base for the turf and thatch (see Figure 15 and Figure 16). The amount of timber used in the roof would have depended on the amount of timber available. In other islands, particularly Benbecula, North Uist, and Berneray, rope was often used, wound round the purlins, to support the turf and thatch (Walker, McGregor and Stark 1996: 21), as can be seen in Figure 17 and Figure 18. It is possible that a similar construction was in use in the early nineteenth century in Lewis, although there is no evidence of it in the later houses. The ridge-pole (*cabar-droma*) would be laid in the v-shape created as the couples crossed at the roof ridge.

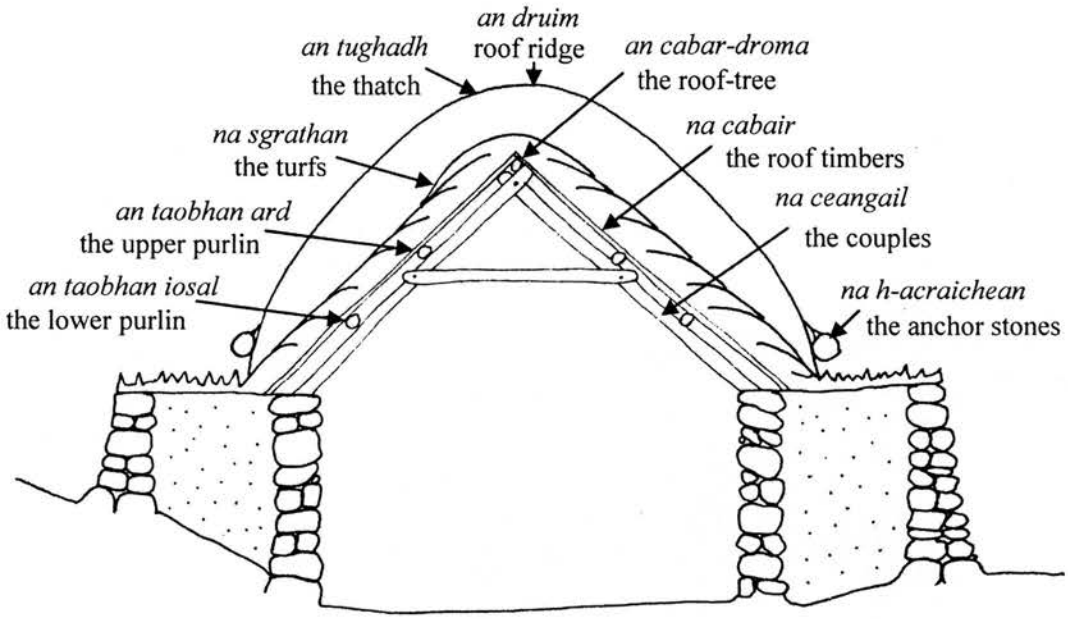
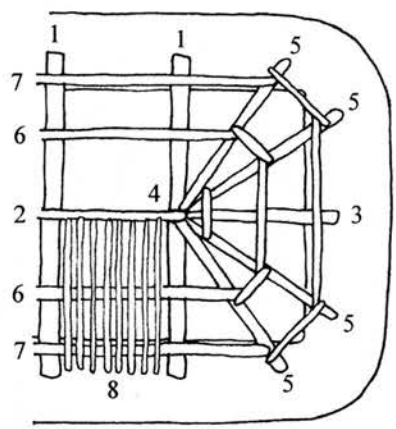


Figure 15: Section through the roof (1:200) (by the author)



1. *na ceangail* (the couples)
2. *an cabar-droma* (the roof-tree)
3. *a' chòrr* (end-couple)
4. *am maide-feannaig* (the crow-stick)
5. *an roinn-oisinn* (corner-couple)
6. *an taobhan àrd* (upper purlins)
7. *an taobhan ìosal* (lower purlins)
8. *na cabair* (side timbers)

Figure 16: Plan of roof timbers (after Fenton 1995: 9) (not to scale)

Figure 17: Roof construction of house at Ruisigearraidh, Bernera, Harris
(Photograph taken by the author, 2000)

Figure 18: Roof construction of house at Ruisigearraidh, Bernera, Harris
(Photograph taken by the author, 2000)

Generally, the type of thatch used would depend on what thatching material was available in the area. In Bragar, the thatch was likely straw, as was common in the

later houses (Inf. I, Inf. J) and it may or may not have been laid on a layer of turf. The thatch, becoming saturated with soot from the fire, was removed annually and spread as fertilizer on the crops. Walker and McGregor (1996: 9) suggest that when a portion of the thatch was used as fertilizer, it was placed directly onto the roof timbers, without an intermediate layer of turf, in order that it more successfully became saturated with soot. The amount of thatch used for fertilizer depended on the amount of fertilizer needed for the next year's crops, and also on the amount of straw available to replace the thatch that was removed. Thatch was certainly being used as fertilizer in the late eighteenth, and presumably early nineteenth, century (*OSA* 1797: 266). Interestingly, although Thomas (1867: 160) mentions the use of turfs on the roof, Mitchell does not. Mitchell does, however, mention the use of divots, in some houses, to construct an 'inner roof' over the wooden box-beds to protect them from drips coming through the roof of the house (Mitchell 1880: 53-54). The minister for Stornoway in his 1833 contribution to the *New Statistical Account* does not mention the use of turf on the roof although he describes the roof in considerable detail (*NSA* 1841: 128-29). It is possible therefore that turfs were used as a roofing material in some houses, or in some townships, and not in others.

Once the roof was thatched, it had to be secured to prevent damage from the wind. This was done by passing ropes, of either straw or heather, from one side of the roof to the other and weighting them at each turn with a rounded stone (*'acair'*, meaning anchor) which then lay against the thatch above the *tobhta* (Thomas 1867: 160; Mitchell 1880: 53). At either end the ropes were passed around the *maide-fithich*, or crow-stick, an extension of the central rafter at the end wall which protruded through the thatch and was used to secure the ropes. In some houses, there was also another set of stones, which lay against the roof at the base of the thatch, presumably as extra security against the wind (see Figure 19).[42]

[42] For more information about roof materials and construction see NicAoidh (2000) and Walker and McGregor (1996).

Figure 19: Reconstructed Norse mills at Shawbost, West Side, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2002)

4.4.3.3 The Floor

> A layer of mud and clay as fine as could be found handy would be procured. This would be well mixed and laid on the floor foundation inside the house and pressed down with the feet of men, but it was not a 'floor' just yet (MacDougall 1933).

The above description was written by a man from Coll but could equally apply to the floors of the houses in Lewis. They were of earth and clay, and MacLeòid (1960) and MacDonald (1990) both describe the practice of preparing a foundation before laying the floor:

> To provide some kind of damp proofing, the floor of a house, when built, was packed with small stones placed on end, to allow any water seepage to move to a lower level, before being covered with a thick layer of clay which provided a level floor (MacDonald 1990: 59).

Kenneth MacDonald (2003: 5) comments that, in his childhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, after laying the clay floor in a house, 'it was customary [...] to invite the boys of the village to hold a few dances there in order to tramp it down.' The postscript to MacDougall's description was that in some cases the feet of men alone were not enough to provide a decent floor surface. Instead, sheep were

driven into the house and kept moving within the four walls, thus providing the new inhabitants with a well packed floor (MacDougall 1933).

The floor at the byre end of the house was often excavated to a depth of between one and five feet in order to accommodate the build up of manure while the cattle were over-wintered (Buchanan 1793: 132-33; Roussell 1934: 14; MacDonald 1990: 59). The existing evidence suggests that a step of between one and two feet was the most common. This step can be seen in many of the houses surveyed, including those belonging to Phases 1 and 2.[43] As mentioned above, the houses were nearly always built on a slope, with the byre at the lower end to prevent the seepage of liquid manure into the living-end of the house. In addition to this, a drain was dug which ran through the centre of the byre and out through a small hole (*toll-lodain* or *toll-dilidh*) at the base of the end wall. The over-wintering of cattle led to a significant build up of manure which was removed every spring and spread on the crops as fertilizer. In order to help solidify the ground beneath the cattle, earth or peat-dust and ashes from the fire would be spread onto the floor at the byre-end of the house on a regular basis (MacKenzie 1911: 10; Morrison 1997: 8). No doubt this would also have contributed to the fertilizing properties of the manure. Mitchell (1880: 51) describes the difference in floor level between entering the house in the summer, when the byre had been cleared of manure, and entering in the spring, before the manure had been removed:

> In passing from the porch to the major block, the byre is first encountered; and in the summer, after the planting of the crops, there is here a step down. In early spring, however, instead of a step down, there are steps up, for the dung of the cattle, which rarely leave the house during the winter, is allowed to accumulate – there being only one annual cleaning of these byres.

4.4.4 Furnishings

The Furnishings of the house consist of the furniture, the decoration, implements and personal effects.

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[43] Presumably if the byre floor was five feet lower than the floor of the living area floor (as suggested by Buchanan 1793: 132-33), or even four feet lower (as suggested by MacDonald 1990: 57), some form of steps would have been necessary to enable tenants to reach the living area.

4.4.4.1 Furniture

Due to the scarcity of wood on the island, wooden furniture in the Phase 1 and 2 houses would probably have been rare. Mitchell (1880: 51) describes the mid-nineteenth century furniture in the Lewis house as follows:

> On one side of the fireplace, supported on two piles of turf, or on two large stones, is a plank, which is the seat of the men of the household. Sometimes, however, there is no plank – nothing, in fact, but a bench of sods. On the other side there is often a rough three-legged stool for the use of the wife. The children and dogs crouch by the fireside in the warm ashes.

The use of stones as furniture was also noted by Robert Campbell (1799) on a visit to St. Kilda at the end of the eighteenth century where he found 'three or four stones elegantly understood to represent tables and chairs'. Straw was also used for seating at that time as Buchanan (1793: 91) describes 'seats made of straw, like foot hassacks, stuffed with straw or stubble'. A century earlier, Martin also made reference to 'seats made of straw', recounting a tale by the then minister of Barvas who was led to his lodging house on the island of Rona, around fifty miles north Lewis, to find 'a bundle of Straw laid on the Floor, for a Seat for me to sit upon' (Martin 1703: 20). Stools may have been made out of drift wood or bog-wood and were low to the ground, to protect the sitter from the smoky atmosphere which would tend to rise (cf. Hirst 2005: 96-97). In the early twentieth century Sir Reginald MacLeod, was told by the Skye factor, John MacKenzie, that the smoke 'never came down below four feet' (MacLeod 1930: 244) Three-legged stools were easier to balance on an uneven clay floor than four-legged stools (Inf. C). The bench was called the '*being*' or '*sèis*' and, in later houses, was usually long enough to seat six people (Inf. B).[44]

By the mid-nineteenth century, although wooden box-beds and wooden dressers were to be seen in a number of houses, tables and chairs were still considered unusual (Thomas 1867: 156; Mitchell 1880: 52). It is unlikely that the Phase 1 and 2 houses would have had box-beds as these seem to have been introduced around the mid-nineteenth century (MacLeòid 1960: 336; MacDonald 1990: 61-62) although, as

[44] The name '*beingein*' was given to a man who went to live with his wife's family after he had married. He was not well favoured for this and was therefore given the position on the *being* furthest away from the fire (Inf. F; Inf. M).

we shall see, some houses did contain wooden beds of a sort.[45] However, it is likely that the inhabitants of the Phase 1 and 2 houses would have had some sort of chests, made from driftwood or similar found timber, in which they would store food and, possibly, clothing. They may have had simple dressers, although even in the mid-nineteenth century these were found only 'occasionally' (Mitchell 1880: 52).

There is no evidence in any of the Phase 1 and 2 houses for wall-shelving above ground level, as can be seen in some of the Phase 3, 4, and 5 houses (see Chapter 6), although in one of the Phase 1 houses, TST(a), there is what may perhaps be a squared ground-level alcove in one wall at the living end of the house. However, as most of the surviving walls of the Phase 1 and 2 houses are very low, and as the sample of houses for these phases is very small, we cannot assume that the available evidence represents a true picture. It is possible that these houses would have had some type of storage space built into the walls although it is worth remembering that people living in the Phase 1 and 2 houses would not have had as many possessions as those in the later houses, and therefore may not have needed as much shelving of this type. For example, the inhabitants of the Phase 1 and 2 houses are unlikely to have had such items as books, clocks, and purchased trinkets to find space for.

Three types of beds may have been common in the earlier houses. Firstly, there was a shakedown bed, made up on the floor in the living area every night, and tidied away during the day. During his tour of the Western Isles from 1782 to 1790, Buchanan (1793: 91) described how '[a]s all persons must have their own blankets to sleep in, they make their beds in whatever corner suits their fancy, and in the mornings they fold them up into a small compass, with all their gowns, cloaks, coats and petticoats, that are not in use'. It seems that this type of bed survived, in some instances at least, down to the late nineteenth century: after a trip to Lewis in 1899, Williams (1900: 77), in his article on 'The "Clachans" of Lewis', mentions that 'the living-room is also the sleeping apartment of the younger men, who recline on the floor with their feet towards the fire'.

[45] The introduction of box-beds will be discussed in section 6.11.1 below.

The second type of bed was the wall-bed, or *crùb* – a bed built into the thickness of the wall. The *crùb* has been described in detail by Thomas (1867: 157-59), MacLeòid (1960: 336-37), and to some extent by MacDonald (1990: 60). They came in various shapes and sizes – some being built lengthways into the wall, and some widthways (Figure 20). Some were at ground level, and some were raised above the floor. Many were roofed by corbelled stonework rising up from the back of the bed towards the opening in the wall.[46]

Wall-beds were found in two of the Phase 1 houses, *Taigh na Banntraich* and *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh*. *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh* contains two wall-beds, one on either side of where the hearth would have been (Plan 6:). The *crùb* backing onto the *taigh-fhuaraich* (C2) is still standing (Figure 21).

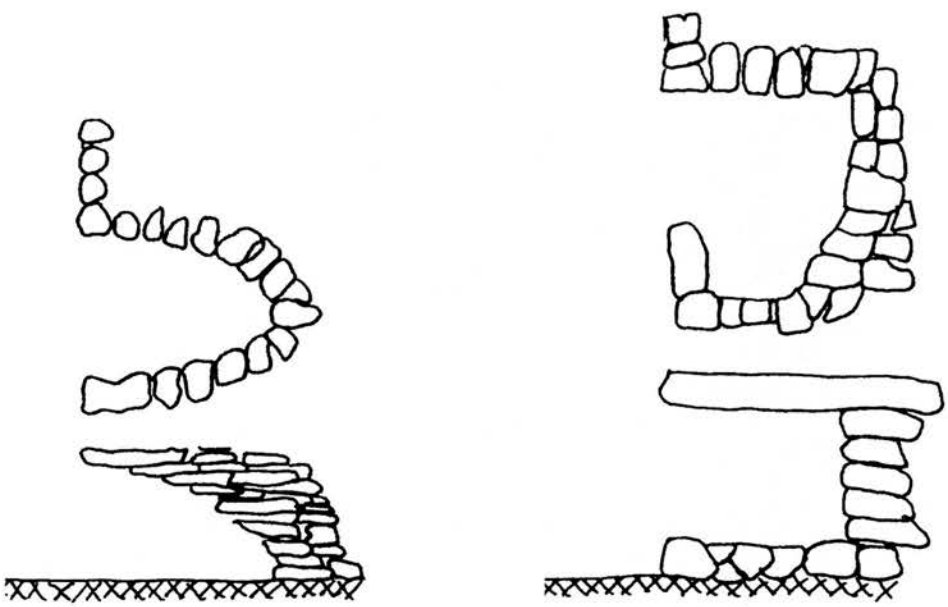
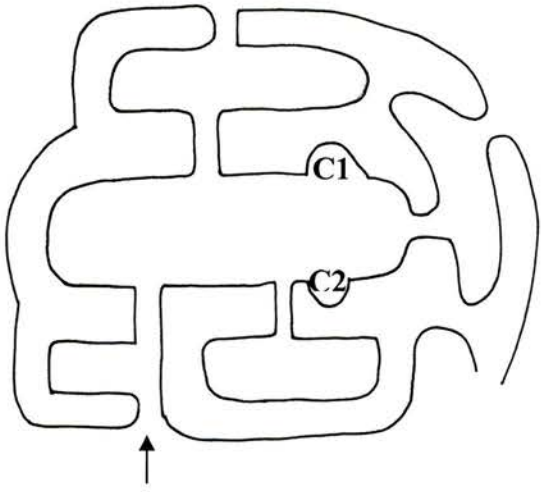


Figure 20: Plan and section of two types of *crùb* (after MacLeòid 1960: 337)

[46] For more information on this type of bed see NicAoidh (2000).



Phase 1

C. *crùb*

Plan 6: Two *crùb*, *Taigh Choinnich MhicRuairidh*, South Bragar (1:250)

Figure 21: *Crùb* (C2), *Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh*, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2000)

It seems that both types of beds may have been in use in the same house, as Thomas (1867: 159) describes the wall-beds saying:

> these were usually boot-shaped cells, that went endways into the wall, decreasing in height as they went inwards. There was usually one opposite to the hearth, and where there was one on each side of the fire, the house was considered well supplied. If there were more in the family than these beds would hold, they lay in a corner upon the floor, railed in by a plank on edge.

Thomas provides evidence for extra beds, of whichever type, being provided both in the barn – 'commonly the sleeping place of the grown-up young people' (Thomas 1867: 156) – and in the byre, where he states that:

> An old lady of my acquaintance, when a girl, was on a visit, where the servant girl used to carry her to her sleeping-place in the wall (which, in this instance, was at the cows' end of the house), that she might not soil her feet by walking among the cattle (ibid.: 259).

He also noted that '[o]ccasionally the second crûb [sic] was in the barn' (ibid.: 159).

The third type of bed was one that was at least partly constructed of timber. During a trip to Lewis in 1838, Mitchell (1883: 233) visited two Lewis houses where he found 'some common boards put together for two or three beds, with one or two cribs on the floor for the children. An old woman lay in some decayed hay in a bed'.

Wooden beds were also described by Jens Jacob Asmussen Worsaae, a Danish antiquarian, who spent a week in Lewis in 1846 looking for 'Scandinavian remains of the Viking Age' (Stummann Hansen 2000: 89). He reported, in a letter to his mother, that in the houses of the people,

> [t]he fire was in the middle of the floor, on a big stone, and nearby the beds were situated along the walls; they were only a sort of wooden plank bed. In some of the houses the beds are only holes in the walls (translated by Stummann Hansen 2000: 89).

It could be that Worsaae and Mitchell were describing the wooden planks resting on stones or turves that served as benches, and it is therefore also possible that these were indeed also used for sleeping on. It may also be, however, that Worsaae was describing the same beds as Thomas later noted, and that the 'wooden plank bed' referred to inhabitants being 'railed in', as Thomas (op. cit.) put it, with the 'wooden plank'.

The layout of the furniture in the living area is worth mentioning. The interest arises from comments made by both Thomas and Mitchell as to the side of the living area on which the husband and wife would sit. As quoted above, Mitchell (1880: 51) described how the men sat on a bench at one side of the fireplace, while the woman of the house sat on a stool at the other. He goes on to say that '[o]n the woman's side, with its back to the cattle, there is occasionally a rude dresser' (ibid.: 51). Thomas (1867: 156) describes this division of space in more detail:

> The fire, which never goes out, is about the middle of the floor; on the right hand side is a bench of wood, stone, or turf, on which the men sit; on the opposite side the women perform their domestic duties.

In a footnote, he continues:

> The *situs* of the bench was of some importance in former times, and was not necessarily on the same side as the door, but was so placed that the occupant should have his left towards the door, and, consequently, his right arm free, and at liberty to protect himself against a hostile intruder.

Interestingly, according to Estyn Evans (1957: 65), it was also the custom in Ireland for the men to sit on the right, and the women on the left. It is very possible that this was the custom in Lewis at the time of the Phase 1 and 2 houses. I found no evidence of this practice amongst my informants.

4.4.4.2 Decoration

As mentioned above, the walls of the houses were of dry-stone, and in the Phase 1 and 2 houses neither the inner nor the outer walls would have been decorated in any way. Nor was there any ceiling – the roof-space was left open to the rafters. It is impossible to say if there were any other decorative features that would have been apparent in these early houses, but it is certainly possible that perhaps other objects, rather than the fabric of the building, may have displayed some decoration or had some decorative value.

4.4.4.3 Implements and Effects

It is not within the remit of this thesis to look closely at the implements, or the personal effects of the people who lived in these houses, other than where they are relevant to the thesis question. Suffice to say, in Phase 1 and 2 houses, personal effects would probably have been few, and any implements would have related to

agriculture, fishing or cooking. Cooking equipment, such as there was, would have been kept '*aig an teine*', and agricultural and fishing equipment was probably kept in the *fosglan* or in the barn. Mitchell (1883: 233) also mentions that the living end of the house was 'hung round with fish, pieces of rope, net, or other implements used either in fishing or in agriculture'.

4.4.5 Social, Cultural, and Environmental Influences on Housing

As discussed in Chapter 3, we do not know the origins of the type of house that existed in Lewis in the late eighteenth century. However, we can discuss to what extent the design of the house was influenced by the environment in which it was built, and by the society and culture of which it was a part.

It is impossible to determine the exact position of all of the houses in any of the pre-lotting settlements in Bragar without excavation. However, Gibbs' map (Map 6 and Map 7) suggests that the houses were situated fairly close together, with the arable land around them. Houses would not have been built on the best arable land and therefore their position on the site would largely depend on where the best arable land was situated. Where two or more houses stood back-to-back, constituting Thomas' '*creaga*', it is likely to have been the result either of an extension built onto an existing house, or, perhaps more likely, because the plot of land to be set aside for house building suited the construction of two or more houses together.

The primary goal of any shelter is to protect its inhabitants from the elements, and houses in Lewis were particularly well suited to keeping out the wind and the cold in winter, and the heat of the sun in summer. The thick double-skinned walls, with their earthen core, left the house well insulated against the cold, and kept the heat of the fire in. They also protected the interior of the house from absorbing too much heat from the sun in the summer. Protection from the cold in winter and the sun in summer was also helped by the lack of window openings in the walls and roof.

Houses were protected from strong winds by the rounded ends of the walls, and the roof was set back from the outer edge of the wall and well secured by ropes and

anchors, which ensured that the wind had nothing to grab hold of. In fact it has been said that in one of these houses there could be a gale blowing outside and you would not even be aware of it (Murray 1973: 191; Inf. D).

Murray (1973: 189-90) suggests that the development of this type of house with its thick walls may have been encouraged by the Little Ice Age (c.1550 – 1700CE), during which the weather worsened in the Hebrides. Thomas (1867: 155) also comments on the thickness of the walls saying that he was 'inclined to suppose that the practice originated when the climate was much colder than at present, and has continued in use ever since.'

The houses were slightly less well suited to protect the inhabitants against rain than they were to protect against wind. The thatch was not completely waterproof and, after heavy rain, wet, sooty drops, called *snighe*, would often fall from the roof into the house. As Mitchell suggests, this was probably mainly due to the annual use of the thatch as fertilizer:

> The object of the roof is not simply to protect from rain and cold, but to accumulate soot, and it is consequently never completely water-tight. After heavy rain the water comes through and blackens everything on which it falls, bringing with it the glistening pitchy pendicles of soot which usually fringe the rafters (Mitchell 1880: 53).

Walls, too, were often described as damp. It is common, in areas of high rainfall, to have roofs with overhanging eaves, in order to direct the rainwater away from the walls. In Lewis, there were no eaves (to protect the roof from the wind) and the thatch finished in the middle of the *tobhta*, on top of the wall-hearting. Opinions differ as to whether this construction was for the express purpose of allowing rain water to run off the roof and into the hearting, or whether the hearting was topped with a layer of clay in order to prevent water falling form the roof from seeping into them. Many islanders seem to believe the former, while archaeologists and architects who have studied the houses generally believe the latter. For example, Angus MacLeod, from Calbost in Lewis, suggests that

> [t]he water from the roof percolated down through the earth in the cavity and formed a damp blanket of earth which created an effective insulating barrier that

> prevented the heat inside the house from escaping through the wall and the cold and wind from the outside from penetrating through to the inside. Also, the stones in the inner wall were set with a slight slope outwards towards the cavity in order to prevent the passage of moisture from penetrating into the interior (Hirst 2005: 48-49).

Walker and McGregor (1996: 4), on the other hand, state that

> [t]he commonly held belief that the core has to be kept wet to eliminate draughts and that the stone skin are built to channel the water inwards is totally erroneous as water passing down through the core washes out the earth fill through the dry masonry joints leaving the wall structurally unstable.

Anderson Smith (1886: 39) mentions the practice of laying turf on the *tobhta* in order to help rainwater from the roof run off the wall-head. Today, opinion is divided: islanders in some areas are of the opinion that turf was always laid on the *tobhta*, while islanders in other areas believe the *tobhta* was always left bare (Holden 2004: 40). It is likely that both practices were common at one time.

There is some suggestion that, in the construction of the outer wall, individual stones were set slanting outwards, both to prevent water from getting into the hearting through the wall and to aid in the drainage of any water which did get into the hearting. Thus Gibson (1925: 217) was told by an old man in Dunvegan in Skye that

> [i]n a properly constructed Black house both the outer and inner walls were constructed of flat stones, all set at a slight slope downwards and outwards. This Venetian blind effect provided a means, by which the moisture in the intervening space could drain towards the outside and was at the same time prevented from soaking inwards.

Walls may also have been affected by damp rising from the ground beneath them. In Gaelic, this is termed '*tighinn fodha*' as opposed to '*tighinn thilge*' or '*fraigh-shnighe*' (and its derivative '*fraighnich*') which was water coming through the walls of a house (Dwelly 1993: 453, 950).

In fact, current opinion about how wet or dry the inner walls of the house may have been is varied, although a number of informants suggested that damp inner-walls were simply the result of poor construction (Inf. E, Inf. K, Inf. L). This could also reflect on different methods of building and indeed one informant (Inf. F) commented that there were numerous ways of building walls. Certainly the central hearth would have helped to dry out the walls from inside the house.

It seems, therefore, that the primary concern of the inhabitants was shelter from the wind rather than shelter from the rain, although the methods adopted would have been the result of the best possible combination of all variables in relation to protection from the elements. Protection from the rain by way of the roof was most likely compromised by the use of the thatch as fertilizer.

The houses were built using materials that were to be found locally. Stone was plentiful, as was turf and earth, the thatch consisted of whatever thatching material was readily available in the area, and clay for the floors and for the wall hearting was taken from the excavated house site. There were also certain sites in Bragar, for example at the head of Loch Ordais where good, hard clay ('*criadh ghorm*', blue clay) could be found (Inf. B, Inf. F, Inf. J). The thatch from the roof was re-cycled as fertilizer, as was cattle manure and human waste, including soot from the fire which was spread on the byre floor and which permeated the roof thatch. As mentioned above, turf houses may have been wholly re-cycled with the walls also being used for fertilizer.

The layout of the house was also well suited to the physical environment, the climate, and to the society and culture in Lewis at the end of the eighteenth century. Cattle housing was once common in rural areas throughout Europe (Kissling 1943: 82; Peate 1944: 52-54, 81), including Ireland (Campbell 1935: 68) and Wales (Peate 1944: 54). Having the cattle under the same roof, rather than in a separate byre, was partly due to convenience given the frequent bad weather. However it also meant that tenants could keep a close eye on their cattle which were an extremely important commodity at the time, providing the tenants with milk and also with rent, both in money and in kind. It was also believed that the cattle benefited from the heat of the fire, especially in the colder winter months when fodder was short (Sinclair 1953: 83, 78), and particularly as, when food was scarce, cattle were sometimes bled to provide extra sustenance for the human inhabitants (Burt 1754: 121, 23). In addition, the human occupants of the house would have benefited from the extra heat provided by the cattle.

In the late eighteenth century houses, there was no partition between the living area and the cattle. This seems also to have been the case in some late seventeenth century Welsh houses (Peate 1944: 59). This would have afforded the family a constant view of the cattle, and the cattle a constant view of the hearth and the family. Thomas (1867: 157) mentions that '[t]here is a prejudice against shutting out the cows from a view of the fire'. The difference in floor level, resulting in a step down to the byre from the living area would have ensured that the upper end of the house was protected from liquid manure of the cattle, and would also have provided space for the rise in floor-level at the byre-end of the house as the manure built up over the winter. This step, whether down to the byre in the summer, or up to the byre in early spring, along with the 'row of stones' (Thomas 1867: 156) may have been enough to imply a segregation of living areas between the human and the animal occupants of the house. It is worth noting that such a difference in floor level between the byre and the living area was also common in Welsh byre-dwelling houses (Peate 1944: 57).

It is also important to note that the lack of a partition would have allowed the family to sit at the fire and have a clear view of the door. The only door was into the byre-end of the house. This raises two questions. First of all, why was there only one door and not two – one for the humans and one for the cattle? Secondly, why was the one door in the byre end of the house (sometimes at the end furthest from the living area), rather than at the junction between the byre end and the living end?

In order to best protect the inhabitants from the ravages of the weather, the fewer openings in the walls and roof of the house the better. Also, as timber was scarce, a second door may have been more difficult to provide. If there was no timber available, doors could be made of straw matting or calf-skin on a timber frame, however the less durable the material, the less protection it afforded the inhabitants.

That the door was into the byre-end of the house is understandable, as it was more convenient to have the human inhabitants walk through the byre-end of the house to

reach the living-end, than to have the cattle walk through the living-end of the house to reach the byre. However, many of the doorways were in the lower end of the byre, rather than at the upper end, closest to the living area, meaning that the human inhabitants had to walk the length of the byre before reaching the living area. Not only that, but over the winter, as the floor-level of the byre rose above that of the living area, it may not have been easy for the people to negotiate the, sometimes significant, step up into the byre, and then the step down, to exit the house. The question remains, therefore, what was the advantage of bringing the cattle in through the lower end of the house? A possible answer is that it simply protected the living area further from the inclement weather – any draughts would have stayed in the byre-end of the house.

In the late eighteenth century houses, the hearth was in the centre of the living area, and was open on all sides. The open, central hearth is a common feature in vernacular housing in Scotland, although there are many variations to be found in different regions and over time (Fenton 1981: 3-5). Kenward (1938: 82) suggests it was found particularly in houses that had hipped, rather than gable roofs, where the hearth would often otherwise be in the gable wall. Fenton (1981: 6) comments that the central hearth was usually found in 'longhouses', such as we are dealing with here, which housed both humans and animals under the same roof. The central hearth, with no chimney or other method of smoke extraction, would distribute heat evenly around the living area and enable more people to warm themselves around it. It also allowed more people to sleep around the fire and get the benefit of its warmth (cf. Fenton 1981: 9).

The lack of a smoke-hole, or chimney, above the fire should not be seen a primitive feature of these houses, as even early shieling huts had smoke holes (Fenton 1985: 74).[47] Smoke was purposefully allowed to gather in the house in order to ensure that the thatch became as saturated as possible, as this would produce better fertilizer.

[47] Shieling huts were where the women and the young folk stayed during the summer months when the cattle were taken out to pasture (i.e. to the shieling). There were various types of vernacular shieling huts in Lewis, from the early beehive structures which can still be seen in Uig, to the more modern huts of turf or stone, modelled on the houses of the people. As far as I am aware, none of these types of huts is in use today.

The lack of windows also helped to ensure that the smoke from the fire escaped through the thatch and not through any other opening in the walls or roof. The small holes in the base of the thatch could also be blocked up with turf during bad weather (Murray 1973: 191). It is also interesting to note that, in some places at least, the people were of the opinion that it was the *smoke* from the fire that provided the heat (MacKenzie 1810: 74; Burt 1754: 45). This belief may have arisen over time as a result of never having known the heat from a fire outwith a smoke-filled environment.

The Phase 1 and 2 houses I surveyed all had a barn adjoined to the house and, in at least four of them, access was from the byre. The barn was used regularly as it stored food for both the human and animal inhabitants, and it was convenient therefore to be able to access it without having to go outside. However Pounds (1993: 130) suggests that in areas on the 'Atlantic fringes of Europe', separate barns were more common as winters were relatively mild: '[a]s a general rule, the separate barn, stable, and farmhouse [...] were to be found where the rigors of winter and the hardship of working outdoors were least. And that, by and large, meant the Atlantic fringes of Europe.' While this may have been the case in some areas of the Atlantic fringe, many of those areas, such as Lewis, *would* have suffered from extremes of weather, particularly from extremes of wind and rain. These extremes may have been even more acute in the past and thus it may be, as Thomas and Murray suggested (see above), that the attached barn developed in Lewis when the climate was colder and wetter than it is now.

All of the Phase 1 and 2 houses, and many of the later houses, also had a *fosglan*, or porch, attached to the front of the house. As mentioned above, the *fosglan* of the Phase 1 and 2 houses was smaller than that of the later houses and it is likely, therefore, that its main purpose was, as Childe (1931: 183) suggested, 'to exclude draughts'. It is worth noting that, in Skye at least, it was quite common to have a wall built out from the doorway to provide some protection from the wind (Walker

1989a: 57; Dwelly 1993: 990).[48] A good example of this can be seen in Figure 22, which shows an L-shaped wall, protruding from one side of the doorway, to the left of the byre-dwelling unit. The picture also shows the *toll-lodain* (drainage hole) in the end-wall of the byre and the drainage ditch running from it.

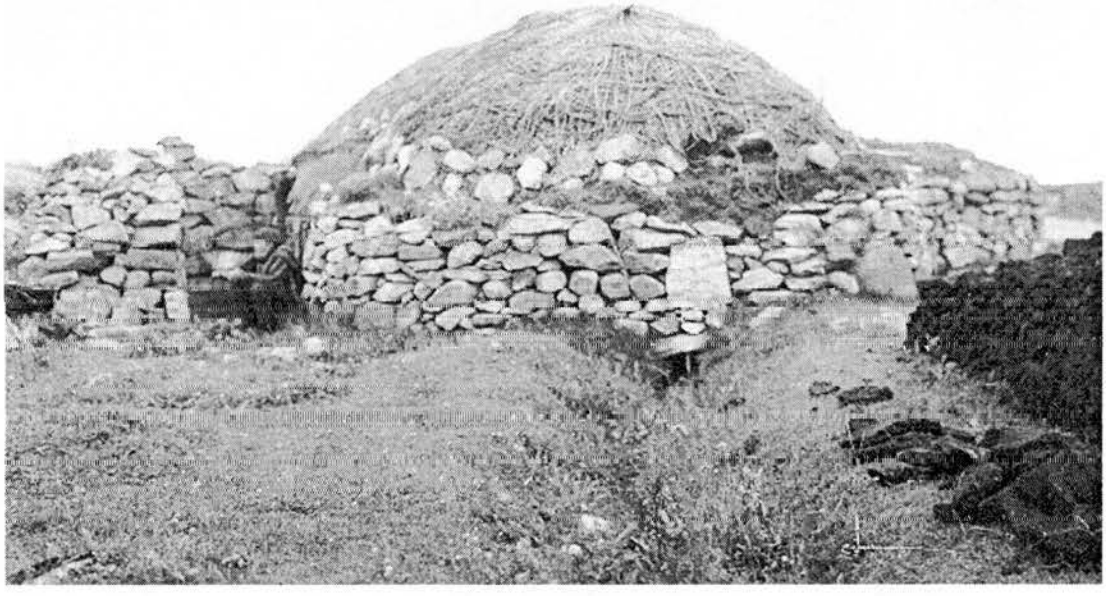


Figure 22: House in Shawbost, West Side, Lewis, 1936
(Courtesy of Dr. Finlay MacLeod)

I have seen a photograph of a house in Bragar from the early to mid-nineteenth century which had such a wall (Inf. A), and in house 46, a low wall can still be seen today (see Figure 23). It is likely that this wall was once higher and used to form a wind-break around the door. The prevailing wind in Lewis is from the south-west and, as can be seen from the house plans in all phases, houses were usually, although not always, entered from the south or the east.[49] A south facing entrance would be

[48] Interestingly, the primary definition of the word used in Skye for this type of wall, *udabac* (the same term used in Lewis to define the wall-hearting), is given by Dwelly (1993: 990) as being 'Porch'.
[49] Two Gaelic proverbs explain the best way to orientate the house: '*An ear 's an iar, an dachaidh as fheàrr*' ('An east-west house is best') and '*Cùl ri gaoith, aghaidh ri grèine*' ('Back to the wind, front to the sun').

beneficial in that it would make the most of the available daylight, necessary for undertaking tasks such as spinning. It was not uncommon for women to take their spinning work out of doors and this may also have encouraged the use of a wind-break.

Figure 23: House on lot 46, South Bragar, showing a low wall to the left of the door

(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

As discussed above, some houses also had a *taigh-fhuaraich* ('cold room' or 'upper room'), which provided extra sleeping and storage space. It is possible that extra units such as this were found mainly in houses where there was a particularly large family, and enough land to build on.

It has been shown that the fabric of the building was heavily influenced by the environment – both the climate, and the materials available. The shape of the building (the rounded ends and the rounded roof set back from the edge of the wall)

seems to have been a response to the strong winds in the area. The fact that the different units were all roofed separately is probably a result of the shortage of timber. It was easier to find timber to span the width of two or three narrow units, than to span the width of one or two large units. The thatch was of local material, and durable stone for building was plentiful. Earlier houses may have been made of turf and, if this was the case, it is likely that it was due to the frequent re-building of houses in different locations. The turf walls may also have been used as fertilizer.

The function and features of the house were also well suited to the environment and the *genre de vie* of the time. Cattle housing, the lack of partitioning within the byre-dwelling unit, the unenclosed central hearth, and the agglomeration of connected units in the house, show signs of social, cultural, and environmental influences. For example, the housing of cattle and the agglomeration of units can be partly explained by environmental necessity. In order to reduce the amount of arable land being built upon, and to conform to the shape of the land available for building houses, the different units of the house were joined together, and they were connected in three rows, rather than in a single line as was common elsewhere in the Highlands. This was partly due to the shape of the land, and partly due to the necessity of being able to move between units without having to leave the house, as would be the case where the barn, byre, and stable were attached 'end-on' as was common in Tiree (Boyd 1986). Cattle housing can also be seen in terms of social influences as the cattle were a precious commodity both for economic purposes, and to provide food for the family. It may also have evolved in response to cattle raiding (MacLeòid 1960: 338) as small numbers of cattle would have been safer if housed with the family at night. However, there were also cultural influences involved – it was believed that the cattle should be should be able to see the fire, and benefit from its heat. Thomas reported that (1867: 157), '[t]here is a prejudice against shutting out the cows from a view of the fire'. Anderson Smith (1886: 39) also noted this in the early 1870s: '[t]hey say the cows like to have their company and see the fire, and as these are their great mainstay, they pet them accordingly; spoil them with fish-bones for sweet-meats, and treat them with great familiarity generally'. It is possible that the desire to have the cattle near the fire was a result of not only of the importance of cattle in the

society, but was also representative of a wider tradition which recognised the healing and protective properties of fire.[50]

The central hearth and sleeping arrangements also suggest that, at that time, privacy was not particularly important in the culture, and also that the functional attributes of the hearth (such as to heat the whole room, and to permeate the thatch) were more valued than having a smoke-free house. The fact that the thatch needed to be saturated with soot shows that there were agricultural reasons for the lack of a chimney or other smoke-vent. The lack of windows and the single door, protected by the *fosglan*, shows both environmental and cultural influences. The house was more secure and protected from the climate because it had fewer openings in the walls and roof. These traits also show that cultural notions of comfort and sanitation were different then from what obtains today. Windows were not considered a necessity, either to see out of, or to open and let fresh air in. The practice of using the same door as the cattle, and walking through the byre to get to the living end of the house was not considered unsanitary – either that or the benefits of one outweighed the disadvantages of the other.

Comparing the plans of the Phase 1 and 2 houses, it can be seen that, although many houses contained similar elements, no two houses were the same. They were all built to answer to their specific site, the immediate environment, and the needs and desires of each family.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, therefore, houses were built by the tenants to suit their own social and cultural needs, using available materials, and were well adapted to their environment. Although the tacksmen and ground officers were of a higher standing than the tenants socially, it is likely that they lived in houses that were similar to those of the ordinary tenants. Johnson (1775: 161-62) comments at the end of the eighteenth century, that while travelling on Skye,

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[50] For example, there have been references to new babies being 'blessed' over the fire (MacDonald 1953), and fire was also used in certain rituals to bring good fortune and for cleansing and healing, both for humans and for cattle (Carmichael 1928). For more information on the importance of the hearth in these houses, see NicAoidh (2000).

> [w]e were driven once, by missing a passage, to the hut of a gentleman, where, after a very liberal supper, when I was conducted to my chamber, I found an elegant bed of Indian cotton, spread with fine sheets. The accommodation was flattering; I undressed myself, and felt my feet in the mire. The bed stood upon the bare earth, which a long course of rain had softened to a puddle.

At that time, it seems probable that, in the rural Highlands, class distinction, between the middle and lower social classes, was not as obviously shown through differences in housing fabric as it later became. Instead, it was perhaps more likely to be shown through differences in housing furnishings, such as the bedding in the quote above, and possibly through housing function and features.[51]

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the pre-lotting settlement consisted of a number of tenants working an area of arable land together in what might be termed a 'joint-farm', and that a number of such joint-farms constituted a township. It has shown that although arable land was not held or farmed communally, as was the common grazing land, the system of arable farming was based, to a large extent, on mutual co-operation, with a number of tasks in the yearly agricultural cycle being carried out in common.

Having described the physical attributes of the pre-lotting house, using the available written and physical evidence, this chapter then discussed the possible socio-cultural and environmental factors that influenced the design and use of the house, and showed that many features of the house, such as the lack of a chimney and the build-up of manure in the byre, were intimately connected to the agricultural practices of the people. Many elements have also been shown to have environmental influences, such as the structure of the walls and the inter-connected barn and byre. It has been shown that many elements are a result of, or can be explained by, a number of different influences. For example, the lack of chimney also encompassed beliefs about the smoke heating the house, and the animals benefiting from the heat.

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[51] See Fenton and Walker (1981: 139) for a short discussion on the difference between tenants and tacksmen's houses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Chapter 5

The Late MacKenzie Period 1783-1844

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the general trend towards Agricultural Improvement in Scotland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It touches on the Scottish Enlightenment, and the influence of Enlightenment thinking on Improvement, and looks at the various ways in which landowners attempted to improve their estates. The chapter then introduces F. H. MacKenzie, who owned Lewis between 1783 and 1815, and discusses his attempts at Improvement in the island, which included the first lotting of the island, and the abolition of runrig. The chapter then turns to MacKenzie's daughter, Lady Hood, and her husband Stewart MacKenzie, who, between them, owned the island between 1815 and 1844, and discusses Stewart MacKenzie's attempts to implement housing change on the island. This chapter finishes with a discussion of the tenants' attitudes to the Improvements which took place during this period.

5.1 The General Trend Towards Improvement

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the island was first lotted by F. H. MacKenzie towards the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the early nineteenth century. MacKenzie's re-organisation of land and settlement in Lewis was part of a general trend in Scotland, at this time, towards Agricultural Improvement, and in order to determine what motivated MacKenzie to undertake such a task in Lewis we must ask what was happening elsewhere in Scotland, and indeed in Europe.

From the 1730s onwards, Scotland was becoming renowned throughout Europe for its enlightened thinkers, and the Scottish Enlightenment was a major influence on the Scottish upper and middle classes (Devine 2000: 65). Central to the Scottish Enlightenment was the 'fundamental belief in the importance of reason, the rejection

of that authority which could not be justified by reason and the ability through the use of reason to change both the human and the natural world for the better' (ibid.: 66).

Scottish Enlightenment thinking, and the debate it generated, was not confined to the great writers and thinkers of the period such as David Hume and Adam Smith. Its widespread influence was partly due to its dissemination throughout the ranks of the Scottish social orders. This dissemination was made easier by the practical nature of its ideas, which 'facilitated the transmission of enlightened ideas to the wider community' (Devine 2000: 67), and thus 'ensured the social acceptance of basic ideas that might otherwise have remained arcane, remote and abstract' (ibid.: 67).

We therefore find, during the period of Agricultural Improvement in Scotland (which began towards the end of the eighteenth century, and continued well into the nineteenth century in many areas, including the western Highlands and Islands), the notion that man has it within his power to improve his circumstances, and that he is now 'able to influence and control his environment to a much greater extent than had ever been thought possible before' (Devine 2000: 67). He also now had the rationale to effect change under the guise of 'Improvement' and had the backing of Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, which expounded the concept of free trade and individual enterprise 'for the good of all'. This assertion of change to the benefit of all played no small part in the development of the process of Agricultural Improvement, and the justification of Improvement, throughout Scotland, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although it was often the case that, as Devine (2000: 66) puts it, 'the Improvers were more interested in the practicalities of enclosures, drainage and new crops than in the detailed issues of philosophical debate', a landowner more interested in improving his own income through the introduction of sheep farming or of specific crops, was seen also to be improving the overall condition of his tenants by bringing them into the 'civilised' world.

The period from around 1730 to around 1830 (Smout 1996) saw changes in agriculture throughout Scotland, and the rest of Europe. This was also a time of great industrial expansion which brought about the creation and development of many urban and rural centres of industry, particularly in textile manufacture, such as New Lanark, built between 1784 and 1796 (Nuttgens 1989: 26). Industrialisation had a considerable influence on Highland affairs. Among other things, it led to a greater demand, in the lowlands, for wool and for kelp (Devine 2000: 183-84), both of which feature prominently in Lewis history during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thus, during the second half of the eighteenth century, with the rapid industrialisation of Britain and Western Europe, and the population growth it generated,

> [t]he economy of the highlands changed radically, so that its near-independence was transformed into almost total subordination to the demands of lowland industry. By the early nineteenth century the supply of cattle and sheep, wool, kelp, and labour to the southern towns had become the specialized function of the west highlands (Cregeen 1996: 9).

Highland landowners at this time were more than willing to make the necessary changes to take advantage of this newfound source of income. The clan-based structure of Highland society had, since the sixteenth century, been giving way to a more economic-based society as the State began to exercise ever-increasing control over the area (Devine 2000: 170). In the past, clan chiefs had a responsibility to their clansmen and their social standing was based, partly, on the number of fighting men they could raise. By the late eighteenth century, to all intents and purposes, clan chiefs had become landlords, clansmen had become tenants, and the relationship between them had become one which was predominantly 'based on commercial values' (Cregeen 1996: 9).

This change 'from chiefs to landlords' (Dodgshon 1998) was primarily due to the integration within the Highland social structure of features of the Lowland and English system (Cregeen 1996: 8-9). Therefore by the late eighteenth century, the reputation of a highland landowner was expressed not in the number of fighting men at his command (although we shall see below that this method of gaining social standing had not disappeared entirely), but rather in the amount of money he

commanded which was shown, for example, in the clothes he wore and in the property he owned. The final stages of this transformation took place in the second half of the eighteenth century as the demand for Highland produce grew in the south. Highland proprietors began to offer land to the highest bidders and rentals were increased in order to take advantage of the increased earnings of the tenants:

> The growing commercial economy of the decades before *c.* 1760 could be uneasily accommodated within the old social structure but the traditional order was no longer compatible with wholehearted agricultural production for the market at competitive prices. Important consequences ensued. The transition of clan chiefs and gentry to landed gentlemen, which had been under way for several generations, was finally achieved and the heritable trusteeship of clan élites, obliging them to secure and maintain the landed possessions of their kindred and associates within their territories, was abruptly abandoned in favour of other priorities. Land came to be allocated through competition to those bidders able and willing to offer the highest return (Devine 2000: 173).

The second half of the eighteenth century saw Agricultural Improvement taking place throughout the Highlands. The improvements carried out on each estate depended not only on the individual 'repertoire' of the landowner, but on the environmental make-up of the area in question (Devine 2000: 173). In some areas, for example Argyll, single-tenant farms became commonplace. Some estates became mainly pastoral or arable while others contained both pastoral and arable farm land (ibid.: 174). In many areas, particularly in the lowlands and around the east coast, new 'planned villages' were created (Smout 1996). In such cases large tracts of land were enclosed and let to single farmers. New methods of agriculture were employed, such as the use of improved crops and ploughs (Handley 1963: 73-89), productivity was increased, and, in order to deal with the now superfluous agricultural population and the surplus of agricultural produce now being generated, villages were built and attempts were made to introduce other forms of industry into the area, for example fishing or textiles, which would offer employment to the dispossessed tenants, and a market for the surplus food (Smout 1996: 75, 89). The displacement of the existing population was justified by the notion that such changes would benefit the population both economically and morally (ibid.: 77). That such villages met, eventually, with varying degrees of success is not directly relevant to this discussion. What is important here is that such schemes were being undertaken

elsewhere in Scotland, and were visible to the wider landholding population. In the north and west, however,

> [a] more notorious group of landowners had ideas of directing settlement when they compelled the inhabitants of Highlands settlements to leave their dwellings and to live by kelping and crofting in new townships on the coast: however, since they generally provided no amenities, no secure leases or feus, no new houses, and made no other attempt to diversify employment, it would be a degradation of the term to include their efforts among the planned villages (Smout 1996: 82).

Landowners in the north and west were influenced, however, by those 'contemporary ideas about villages' (Smout 1996: 82) that had taken hold in the south and east, which advocated making more profitable use of the agricultural land, and moving the tenants to areas where they would earn their living through some other industry such as fishing, with perhaps a small plot of land for themselves.

Agricultural Improvement was about improving productivity, and consequently income, through the introduction of better farming techniques and practices, and it was also about civilising the agricultural population. The assumption behind Enlightenment thinking was that achieving the first desire would automatically lead to improvement in the second, and that the second was most easily acquired by focusing on the first. Enlightenment ideals and the enculturation of the Highland elite towards Lowland, and particularly English, mores, had led not only to a change in beliefs about what it was possible to achieve, and indeed what ought to be achieved, in the external, or social, world, but also to internal, cultural changes. The right clothes were important to the new Highland landed gentry, but so were the right manners and the right standard of living. The eighteenth century saw, amongst the Highland landed classes, the introduction of new tableware with cutlery and crockery becoming more common. It also saw the introduction of imported foodstuffs, of expensive furniture, and of the habits, manners, and speech deemed appropriate for the upper echelons of English society (Smout 1973: 265-71). According to Smout (1973: 271) the two main reasons for this 'revolution in manners' were the desire to emulate all things English, and the introduction of new blood into the landed classes through well-travelled, and world-experienced merchants and adventurers:

> Few landed Scots doubted that England began with a more polite and more desirable civilisation than their own, or that it was a duty of patriotism to match

> and even to outshine the southerners' model whether it was in teacups, in good tone, or (as we shall see) in farming (Smout 1973: 271).

Thus the landed classes became used to higher standards of living, and there inevitably followed a rise in those standards that were deemed 'normal'. It also had the effect of widening the growing social and cultural gap between tenant and landowner (Smout 1973: 266, 271).

These newfound ideals and beliefs, and the effects they had on the perception of the landowners with regard to their estates and, in particular, their tenants, have been well summarised by Devine (2000: 186):

> These included a view of the existing social order as 'primitive' and urgently in need of reform, an uncritical belief in the values of individualism and a contempt for the traditional patterns of life and work as demonstrating the indolence, fecklessness and inefficiency of the people. These assumptions made it much easier to reorganize their estates along more rational and profitable lines. The landlords were not simply making more money, they could also justify the abrogation of their traditional responsibilities by claiming that it was a necessary evil in order to 'civilize' and 'improve' their estates.

In order to bring about Agricultural Improvement, there were two essential components that were adopted by landowners throughout the Highlands: the abolition of runrig, and the enclosure of holdings.

As discussed above, as a method of farming, runrig was particularly well suited to the landscape and life-style of the people. However it was an unproductive method of farming and was considered backward by those keen to improve production. With the abolition of runrig, the land was thus divided into lots (otherwise known as 'crofts'), and each tenant was allocated a plot of land which they alone would farm, and on which they would build their house. Within this new system, pasture land was still held in common and lots were held on year-long leases. This method of 'lotting' the land was taking place throughout the Highlands and Islands during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a method of implementing Agricultural Improvement through the abolition of runrig (cf. Napier 1884: 17).

The enclosure of holdings was seen as an essential development in the process of Agricultural Improvement for a number of reasons. Primarily, it allowed for the division of arable and grazing land into enclosures of appropriate sizes to maximise productivity, and for the introduction of new crops and new methods of crop rotation (Devine 1994: 51). The enclosure of land went hand in hand with the abolition of runrig and the creation of individual holdings, reinforcing the new 'every man for himself' way of farming, and the individualist way of thinking. In Lewis, where the land was more suitable for grazing, land was enclosed to create sheep-farms and, later, deer forests.

Other methods of Improvement were also employed by many landowners during this period, such as the phasing out of the tacksman class and the construction of roads. The introduction of single-tenant farms or crofts, through the process of lotting, gave landowners the opportunity to re-rent the land, increasing individual rents where they saw fit. The abolition of the tacksmen also allowed the landowners to recoup the excess of rentals which had earlier gone to these middle-men (Devine 2000: 174).

Two of the most important concepts in Enlightenment thinking that formed the basis of the re-organisation of settlement in the Agricultural Revolution, were those of individualism and order. Order and symmetry in architecture and in town and village planning were very important during the period of Improvement and this is reflected, for example, in the neo-classical architecture of Robert Adam and in the symmetrical grid pattern of Edinburgh's New Town (Devine 2000: 66), which influenced town and village planning throughout the country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Glendinning et al. 1996: 181). Planned villages and improved farms in the south and the east of Scotland also reflected this new sense of order.

In the west of Scotland, landowners realised these concepts in the new, linear settlement layouts that replaced the small clusters of dwellings of the pre-Improvement period. The abolition of runrig and the enclosure of holdings could have been achieved within the existing settlement layout, but Enlightenment thought dictated the imposition of spatial order as a means to implement the new social order.

Improvement in the Highlands and Islands was not just about the restructuring of townships, or increased productivity, it was also about civilising the people, ridding them of their old social values, and bringing them into the new British (effectively English) social order. Through the implementation of new spatial orders through linear settlement, improvers 'sought to fundamentally alter routine practice and the everyday environment on a wide scale' (Dalglish 2000: 287). Thus the physical re-ordering of space that came with Improvement embodied the ideas of individualism and order, becoming 'a powerful metaphor for social control' (ibid.: 238). Creating order on the ground can therefore be seen as symbolising social order and social control. Such methods of implementing social change and control through spatial planning were commonly used by colonial settlers. In the Pacific Islands, for example, '[t]he places that colonial governments and missionaries tried to create in the process of converting and "civilizing" islanders involved extensive changes to settlement patterns, houses, and households' (Rensel and Rodman 1997: 14). Given the drastic re-ordering of space evident in Improved settlements, and the imposition of Enlightenment social values, it is not unreasonable to compare the methods employed by Improving Scottish landowners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with those employed by British colonial governments.

5.2 F. H. MacKenzie and The First Lotting

The reasons for the spread of Agricultural Improvement in the Highlands during the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were many, and each landowner would have made the changes that seemed appropriate to his estate at the time, and to his own personal 'repertoire', or background. Improvement was a widespread phenomenon, however, and each landowner would have had ample opportunity to see what was happening elsewhere in the Highlands. It is also worth noting that the Highland and Agricultural Society was formed in Edinburgh, in 1784, specifically to encourage Improvement in the Highlands (Handley 1963: 73).

Francis Humberston MacKenzie, the last Lord Seaforth, obtained ownership of Lewis in 1783 upon the death of his elder brother, and he and his wife, Lady Seaforth, spent much of their time at Seaforth Lodge, until his death in 1815. He was

the first of the MacKenzies to actively try and 'improve' his tenants' way of life (MacKenzie 1919: 168; MacDonald 1990: 36). Among other things, he began constructing roads on the island (*OSA* 1797: 252), and his wife was very much involved in island affairs, setting up spinning schools and donating money to the poor (*OSA* 1797: 269). He would certainly have been aware of the Improvements being implemented elsewhere.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with a view to Agricultural Improvement, estate plans were drawn up for all the estates in the Western Isles (Caird 1989: 49). In Lewis, James Chapman surveyed the island between 1807 and 1809, and compiled the results in his 'Book of the Plans of Lewis', now believed lost. Chapman was the Chamberlain of Lewis from the late 1790s to around 1810 and, as he later worked as a Land Surveyor in Inverness, we must assume that he was well qualified to undertake the Lewis survey (Caird 1989: 52). His work survives in the form of two reductions of his map, the first by Alexander Gibbs in 1817, the second by William Johnson in 1821. The Seaforth Muniments also contain extracts from Chapman's original survey in an 1817 manuscript (GD46/17/46). The extracts detail the extent of arable, fine pasture, rough pasture, and water in each township (ibid.). It is likely that Chapman's original survey was undertaken with a view to lotting the island. Indeed, by 1807, lotting had already begun in Bernera in the district of Uig (Caird 1989: 52).

Lotting therefore seems to have started on the island either in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. However there were still areas of the island, in the Lochs district for example, which had not been lotted by 1833 (*NSA* 1841: 167). I have found no written evidence as to when the first lotting took place in Bragar. Dr. Finlay MacLeod has informed me, however, that an old acquaintance of his from Bragar had believed that it may have taken place in the 1820s. This could well have been the case.

By the late eighteenth century, the MacKenzie estates were in financial trouble. Despite the extra income obtained from the kelp industry and the rise in cattle prices,

and the subsequent increase in rents, the period of MacKenzie's ownership was troubled by debt (Mitchell 1883: 240-42, 245-47; cf. MacKenzie 1903: 484). Devine (1989) suggests that a great many Highland proprietors in the first half of the nineteenth century were labouring under great debt, which eventually led, as was the case in Lewis, to the sale of their estates. He suggests that a large proportion of this debt was hereditary and that

> a considerable amount of income was tied up in servicing the interest charges associated with earlier loans and mortgages. Furthermore, each estate was burdened with an array of annuities, life-rents, jointures and portions for different members of the landed family other than the life tenant (Devine 1989: 117-18).

By 1826, eighty-three per cent of the income from the Lewis estate was appropriated through the payment of interest on prior debts (Devine 1989: 118). It is likely, therefore, that F. H. MacKenzie's decision to introduce large-scale sheep farming to Lewis at the end of the eighteenth century was partly in an attempt to balance estate finances.

There were a number of ways in which MacKenzie could gain financially from lotting the land. Most significantly, by redistributing land throughout the island, he was able to select areas of land suitable for sheep farming, which he could clear of tenants, and then advertise and sell to the highest bidder.[52] Also, by depriving some tacksmen of their land, he could absorb the excess rent they received from their sub-tenants. Lotting the land would also have given him the opportunity to re-rent the island, and the tenants would have had no option but to pay the increase.

However, it is likely that MacKenzie's quest for improvement was not just in order to boost estate finances. From the Articles and Conditions of Set for the island, drawn up in 1795, we can see that MacKenzie was genuinely interested in improving agriculture on the island. He insisted that 'each farm shall be furnished with a proper bull for the improvement of the breed of cattle' (MacKenzie 1795: Article 11), and he was also interested in enclosures, requiring tacksmen and tenants to 'build march dykes for dividing the several farms from each other' (ibid.: Article 12).

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[52] It should be noted, however, that the majority of evictions took place after F. H. MacKenzie's time (MacDonald 1990: 160).

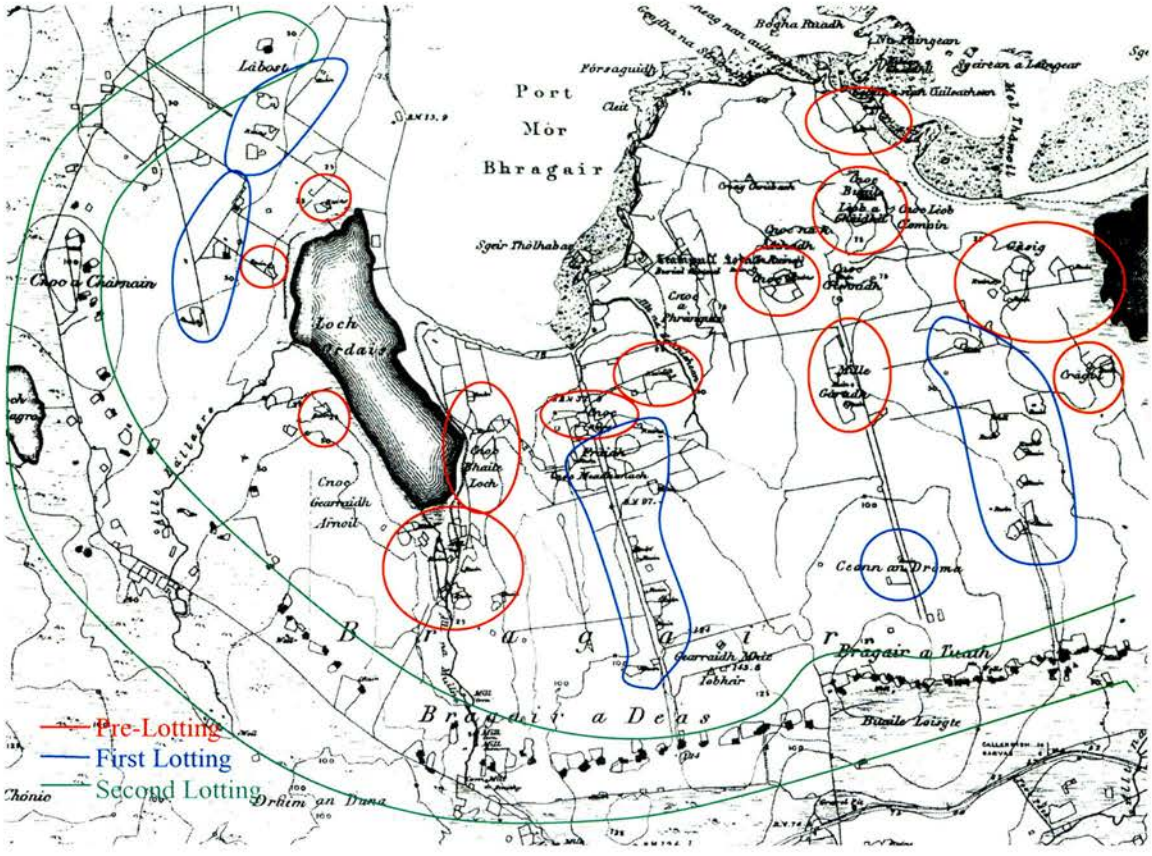
The abolition of runrig is referred to in Article 4, where it is stated that as holding land capable of cultivation in runrig is 'a pernicious tendency', the arable land in each farm is to be divided among the tenants, along with 'certain parts of the most contigious [sic] and convenient uncultivated land of each farm' which is also to be brought under cultivation:

> it is agreed that the arable and uncultivated lands to be divided shall be exclusively possessed by the several tenants to whom the same shall be allotted respectively separately and in common, and that the remaining parts of each farm so let shall be possessed by the tenants thereof as a common pasturage according to the proportions to be specified in the souming herein after directed (MacKenzie 1795: Article 4).

MacKenzie was also keen to improve the quality and/or quantity of the produce of the land, as Article 9 states that

> the said tacksmen tenants and subtenants bind and oblige themselves to leave two fifths of the arable lands of their respective farms ley for the last two years of the tacks now granted or else to pay an additional rent to the proprietor of one pound sterling per acre for each of the said two years for every acre of the two fifths that shall not be left ley in terms of the above obligation (MacKenzie 1795).

In line with the process of lotting taking place throughout the Highlands and Islands at the time, it was MacKenzie's intention that each tenant should have his own plot of land which he would farm and on which he would build his house. There would be no rotation of land amongst the inhabitants, although the township would still hold grazing land in common. Thus the runrig system of farming would be abolished. In Bragar these first lots were laid out parallel to the coast with the houses built against the two roads running down to the sea, *An t-Sràid bho Thuath* and *An t-Sràid bho Dheas*, and another road to the east (see Map 16).



Map 16: Settlement distribution in Bragar (1853)[53]

MacKenzie's intended improvements would have been financially beneficial to the estate, and would also have improved the quality, and possibly the quantity, of stock and produce, to the benefit of both the proprietor and the tenants. Also, there would undoubtedly have been some social standing to be gained by implementing Improvement. If MacKenzie had not taken steps towards Agricultural Improvement it is likely that there would have been certain social setbacks, given that Improvement was seen, socially and morally, as benefiting both landowners and tenants.

It is interesting to note, however, that although much of the 1795 Articles and Conditions of Set details plans for Improvement, there is absolutely no mention of improvements to the housing of the people. Information given in the *Old Statistical Account* informs us that, at the end of the eighteenth century, F. H. MacKenzie was

[53] Ordnance Survey map. Copyright expired. Not to scale. Original scale 1:10,560.

encouraging tenants living on the north side of Stornoway, these being 'sailors, fishers, and other people' (*OSA* 1797: 258), to move to improved houses:

> The poor inhabitants of those huts have built more commodious thatched houses along the shore of the bay, east of the town; and Mr Mackenzie of Seaforth gives every head of a family one guinea to encourage them to remove, and to help them in defraying the expences [sic] incurred on the occasion. He gives those poor people 20 years lease of their dwelling-places, to each of which a small garden is joined, and they pay three Scotch merks yearly for every such house-room and garden. He gives them full liberty to cultivate as much as they can of a neighbouring moor, and exacts no rent for seven years for such parts thereof as they bring into culture (*OSA* 1797: 258).

It could well be that MacKenzie was more keen to improve the housing in Stornoway and its environs, as these were areas which were more exposed to public scrutiny. In the more rural areas of the island, MacKenzie could be seen to be making visible improvements by re-lotting, without having to make the less-visible improvements to housing.

5.3 Stewart Mackenzie and Housing Change

On the death of F. H. MacKenzie in 1815, his estates fell to his eldest daughter, Lady Hood, whose husband, Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, had died a short while before (MacDonald 1990: 37). She married Mr James Alexander Stewart in 1817 and he took the additional surname MacKenzie. The financial problems of the MacKenzie estates increased, however, and the whole of the island of Lewis, with the exception of the parish of Stornoway, was auctioned in Edinburgh in 1825 'for payment of the entailer's debts' (Brand 1902: lxix). It was purchased by Mr Stewart MacKenzie for £160,000.[54]

The first mention of housing improvements comes in the *Articles of Set and Regulations for the Tenants of Land in Lewis*. Unfortunately, there is neither date nor name on the printed edition of the *Articles of Set* that I have come across amongst the Seaforth Muniments in the National Archives of Scotland. It is likely, however, that Stewart MacKenzie (or alternatively Mrs Stewart MacKenzie) was the

[54] I have come across no evidence to suggest why Stewart MacKenzie purchased the island or why, if he had intended to purchase it, it was put up for auction. According to Brand (1902: lxix), '[t]he upset price was £137,384 12s. 4d. (being the value set forth in the advertisement)' and it was only 'after spirited bidding' that 'the property was secured by Mr. Stewart Mackenzie at the price of £160,000.'

author, as the Articles differ considerably in content and style to those of 1795, and there is evidence that Stewart MacKenzie did author a set of Articles prior to 1833 (*NSA* 1841: 129). If Stewart MacKenzie were the author, it is possible that the Articles were written after his purchase of the island in 1825.

Housing is mentioned in Article X, which reads:

> Whenever a tenant shall build a house on his lot, it shall be done in a straight line with the adjoining houses, on a plan to be approved by the proprietor, or as the proprietor or factor shall direct; and the house floor shall be 14 inches above the level of the surrounding ground, and to have a separate entrance to the dwelling house distinct from that leading to the byres or other houses for cattle, and a partition to divide them from such other, so as to allow access to the dwelling apartments without passing through the byres or stables; and such tenants as neglect so to do, shall not be allowed, at the expiration of their lease, to remove any of the materials of their houses, nor be allowed any compensation therefor [sic]. In general, at his removal, the tenant shall either be entitled to sell or remove the materials of his house; but if the proprietor prefers that it should remain, he shall allow valuation for the same at the sight of the birleymen of the barony, or of two neutral men or an oversman; but the house must be left by the tenant in good habitable and tenantable condition, whether his removal shall be at the expiry of his lease, or any time during the currency thereof, by any of the irritancies above-mentioned.

There were therefore five requisites regarding the building of houses. Firstly, the house must be built in line with all the other houses. Secondly the house must be built to a plan approved by the proprietor or his factor. Thirdly, the floor level inside the house must be fourteen inches above ground level. Fourthly, there must be two entrances, one for the cattle and one for the people. Fifthly, there must be a partition between the byre and the living area. This Article also shows that it was common for tenants to remove or sell the materials of their house upon removal, and that this right would be taken from them, if the Article was not followed.[55] The Article also suggests that tenants might be evicted, should they not follow the prescribed regulations. It is worth noting that there was no mention in this Article of the inclusion of windows or chimneys, and that tenants were not forbidden from using their thatch as fertilizer. Other Articles in this document deal with the introduction

[55] This presumably refers to the roof timbers. On the mainland, it was customary for the walls to belong to the tenants, and the roofs to the proprietor (Fenton and Walker 1981: 48). In the Hebrides, however, the walls of the houses belonged to the proprietor, the roofs to the tenants (Buchanan 1793: 93-94). As timber was so scarce in Lewis, it was common for tenants to take their roof timbers with them when they moved house.

of enclosures (Article VIII), the reclamation of peat-moss (Article VI), the trenching of lots (Article V), and the rotation of crops (Article VI). Tenants found not to have trenched the appropriate amount of land on their lot in the allotted time, not to have been partaking in the outlined rotation of crops, or not to have partaken in the required amount of land reclamation, were liable to be fined.

In 1833, the minister of the parish of Stornoway commented on the condition of the people's houses and remarked that

> [t]he proprietor and his lady have ordered, at the present set or lease, that there should be in these dwellings, a separation, by partition, between the rational and the irrational inmates, and that more light should be admitted into the dark recesses of their habitations, by one window at least. In several instances, a reformation has already taken place, but sorely against the will of the people (*NSA* 1841: 129).

There are three points of interest in this quote. Firstly, although at first it seems that the minister's 'present set or lease' might refer to the aforementioned *Articles of Set*, in the printed Articles there is no mention of the introduction of windows or the lack of light in tenants' houses. We must therefore conclude that either another set of Articles was written sometime between the undated set and 1833, or that these were in fact the same Articles, and that the minister was therefore mistaken in his assertion. One other possibility is that regulations were being implemented in Stornoway parish, that were not being implemented in the more rural areas of Lewis, as seemed to have been the case in F. H. MacKenzie's time.

The second point worthy of note is that the minister saw fit to say that the 'present set or lease' was ordered not by Stewart MacKenzie alone, but by the 'proprietor and his lady'. This suggests that Mrs Stewart MacKenzie, formerly Lady Hood, played some part in the running of the island. This is not surprising given that she held the deeds to the island between 1815 and 1824, and other records show that she was, by standards of the time, a quite remarkable woman. She had travelled extensively with her father and her first husband in Barbados and India, and MacDonald (1990: 37) describes her as 'a most outstanding person and possibly the ablest of the Mackenzies'. We cannot, therefore, rule out the feminine influence of Mrs MacKenzie in the decision to include improvements to housing in these undated

Articles of Set. However, Stewart MacKenzie was obviously keen to carry on the work of F. H. MacKenzie by improving the amount of land under cultivation and the quantity of crops produced, and it is perhaps more surprising that the 1795 Articles and Conditions of Set did not contain references to improved housing, than the fact that these new *Articles of Set* did. As mentioned above, many other estates were effecting improvements to housing at this time.

The last point of interest is to be found at the end of the quote in the words 'sorely against the will of the people'. It is not surprising that the tenants were unwilling to build partitions between themselves and the cattle, and to open up an extra door. As discussed in the previous chapter, the cattle were very important to the tenants and the tenants' houses were well suited to the physical and socio-cultural environment. If the tenants could see neither the benefits of such changes, nor the disadvantages of the present situation as seen by 'the proprietor and his lady', they would be reluctant to change. We shall see, below, that by the late nineteenth century, such changes were still being opposed by tenants.

The aspects of the house that were selected for change can tell us a little about what was important in the eyes of the proprietor, and probably therefore the upper classes in general, at that time. Of primary importance was the segregation of cattle from humans. This would no doubt have been partly for sanitary reasons, but it may also have had its roots in Enlightenment thinking, whereby rationality was seen to distinguish humans from animals. It was therefore only right and proper that 'the quadrapeds' should be separated from 'the nobler creatures' (Thomas 1867: 157). The raised floor level also suggests sanitary reasons as it was presumably to prevent water, and possibly slurry, from seeping into the house through the ground. That new houses were to be built 'in a straight line with the adjoining houses' is also of some interest. It suggests that creating a visible sense of order was of great importance, and, as mentioned above, that there was still a need to exert some measure of control over the people by reinforcing the new linear settlement plan, which was in complete contrast to the layout of the pre-lotting settlements.

By the time Joseph Mitchell visited Lewis in 1838, he found 'a kind, docile people, affectionate, and willing to work' although 'ignorant of the civilized modes of life', who 'without direction or example, necessarily continue in their original uncultivated condition' (Mitchell 1883: 232). He described the houses of the people as follows:

> Their houses are built of turf and thatched with straw or heather, huddled together very irregularly, and generally in villages, the grass growing frequently on the tops of the walls and the roofs. There are no windows; a hole admits the light. The door is low, generally from four to five feet. The house is from thirty to sixty feet long, the greater part appropriated to the cattle, and the family part separated occasionally by a mere turf partition (Mitchell 1883: 232).

Although he mentions that in some houses there was a 'mere turf partition' between the byre and the living end, his description suggests that, in general, tenants had not implemented the changes Stewart MacKenzie had stipulated in Article X and that the houses had changed little from those of the pre-lotting period.

5.4 The Tenants

It is unlikely that the tenants, at least those outside Stornoway, were happy with F. H. MacKenzie's Improvements. An important part of their experience of Improvement would have been their relationship with the proprietor. Although it is impossible to say to what extent tenants liked or disliked F. H. MacKenzie, the evictions that had taken place during his reign, his use of the tenants as a resident work-force for kelp-making, and as a supply of men to furnish the British armed forces,[56] suggest that the islanders may not have looked too favourably upon him, although he may have been no worse a proprietor, in their eyes, than his predecessors.

It is therefore unlikely that they would have looked favourably on MacKenzie's decision to lot the island and to abolish the method of farming which they had been practising for generations. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the joint-farm held in runrig

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[56] F. H. MacKenzie was very interested in soldiering and offered to raise men from his estates for various regiments. In 1793 (MacDonald 1990: 118) he offered to raise his own regiment of a thousand men, the 78th, of which he would be in command (GD46/6/25). This was probably as much a result of his desire to raise his family's status, which had fallen in recent years, as of his own interest in the navy. He found the people of Lewis did not share his interest, however, and had difficulty in finding volunteers – so much so that he eventually sent a press-gang to the island to get recruits (MacDonald 1990: 118). For more information on the armed services in Lewis see MacDonald (1990: 116-24).

was a central feature of their farming practices and of their community. There was no incentive for them to change their farming practices, particularly as they were so closely related to their sense of place and community. Although the group activities carried out may not have changed considerably after the first lotting, psychologically, it would have planted the seed of separation, and of individualism, so favoured by Enlightenment thinking. Regardless of their own wishes, tenants would have had little choice but to comply with the first lotting – the alternative would probably have been to lose their holdings, and thus their means of support for themselves and their families.

The effects of such a change on the islanders are hard to gauge. With regard to housing, it must be assumed that the people had to build new houses for themselves on sites specified by the Chamberlain or his ground officers. They would probably have taken the roofs from their old houses to use on the new houses since timber was so scarce. As mentioned in Chapter 2, however, it is likely that some of the pre-lotting houses in Bragar were on sites that allowed them to be retained and lived in after the first lotting. Whether the people were allocated specific lots by the authorities, or whether lots were allocated randomly, or indeed whether tenants had any choice in where they were situated, is unknown. Having been allocated a new lot, the people themselves would then have had to prepare the ground for cultivation. This would have been an arduous job in Bragar given the stony nature of the ground.

Once the move had been accomplished, the daily life of the people may not, in fact, have been that different from their daily life in the pre-lotting settlement. Each family would have worked on their plot of land as they did previously (the difference being that they would cultivate the same plot of land every year), and a number of seasonal jobs would still have been carried out by groups of families or neighbours working together, such as cutting peats, thatching roofs, harvesting and ploughing (Geddes 1955: 120-25). Whether the groups working together corresponded to those living together on the joint-farms cannot be determined. Tenants living in a joint-farm may or may not have been allocated lots in the same vicinity. If not, it is likely that new 'working groups' would have formed amongst neighbouring families.

The change from small, clustered groups of houses, to rows of houses arranged along the two roads no doubt effected some change in the social relations of the community, although it is impossible to determine to what extent. Any one tenant's immediate community may have increased, with more families now living in a smaller vicinity, although families in the pre-lotting settlements would also have recognised the extended community – most joint-farms were within easy walking distance of at least one other joint-farm, and the 'township' would also have been a unit of tenure for activities such as grazing and peat cutting.

As we saw in the previous chapter, whether or not tenants working in runrig had incentive to improve their share of the land is debatable. Despite the best intentions of the proprietor, tenants on the new lots might also have had little incentive to improve – with no security of tenure, and only one-year leases, they did not know whether they, or another tenant, would reap the benefits of any improvements they made to the land. It has been suggested by some authors (for example Devine 2000: 190) that crofts were designed specifically so that they would not be large enough to support a family for a whole year. Tenants would therefore be forced to take on other work, such as kelping and fishing, in order to pay the rent and support their families. It is possible that the proprietors had this in mind when lotting and re-lotting the island, however I think it is important to note that portions of land farmed in the pre-lotting settlements were also perhaps not large enough to support a family for a whole year. Certainly the returns from the land were not enough. The ministers for Stornoway and Uig both commented, in the *Old Statistical Account*, that the parish did not produce enough food: 'In no season is the produce of this parish sufficient to maintain its inhabitants, who would often be in danger of suffering through want, were it not for the extensive importation of meal to Stornoway' (*OSA* 1797: 249). The minister of Barvas states that '[t]he returns are in general poor, owing to the poverty of the soil, and the cold and boisterous gales from the northern ocean, to which the lands are much exposed' (*OSA* 1797: 266). It is unlikely, however, that F. H. MacKenzie created small lots specifically in order to force tenants into kelp-making, since, as we saw in the previous chapter, Articles

were put in place to fine or evict all those who did not comply with the proprietor's wishes (MacKenzie 1795: Article 12).

That tenants did not look favourably on Stewart MacKenzie's attempts to 'Improve' their housing is borne out by Joseph Mitchell's description of houses in 1838 (quoted above), and by the minister of Stornoway's assertion, in the *New Statistical Account*, that any improvements took place 'sorely against the will of the people' (*NSA* 1841: 129). The tenants' reaction to housing change will be discussed in more detail at the end of the next chapter.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the houses of the first lotting (i.e. the Phase 2 houses) do not appear to have differed significantly, in size or in layout, from the pre-lotting (Phase 1) houses. It appears that when the first lotting occurred, and tenants were required to build new houses for themselves, they built them to the same general layout as their previous houses. The four Phase 2 houses all contained a byre-dwelling unit, a *fosglan*, and a barn, and two of them (TIG, and TnB) also contained a *taigh-fhuaraich*.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Agricultural Improvement had its roots in the Scottish Enlightenment, and that the trend towards Improvement brought about not only agricultural change, but also a change in beliefs and values. Landowners were keen to improve their own circumstances, and to be seen to be improving the circumstances of their tenants, and the steps taken by various proprietors depended both on their own circumstances and on the situation of their estates. This chapter has also shown the way in which social control was often exercised by Improvers, with the implementation of a new, geometric settlement layout. F. H. MacKenzie's lotting of the island seems to have been an attempt to improve productivity in the island, and possibly his own social standing, rather than to improve the circumstances of his tenants, with the exception of those in Stornoway. Stewart MacKenzie was the first of the Lewis proprietors to attempt to introduce housing change in rural Lewis although, once again, improvements in Stornoway may have

been more comprehensive than those in rural districts. The first lotting would have been a severe disruption to the tenants, who would have had to re-build houses and prepare new land for cultivation, and it is likely that most tenants would have been opposed to the change. Despite this, however, the nature of their farming practices may not have changed considerably after the first lotting, with a number of activities still being carried out in common with neighbouring families. It has also been shown that tenants were opposed to housing change, which they seem to have resisted, more so than they resisted the settlement changes of the first lotting. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

The Matheson Period 1844-1900

Introduction

The Lewis estate was owned by the Matheson family between 1844 and 1918. This chapter focuses upon the period of ownership from 1844 to 1900 during which time the Matheson family was closely involved in the running of the estate. From 1900 to 1918, although the ownership of the island remained with the Matheson family, the management of the estate was left largely in the hands of various local and national authorities. The period from 1900-1918 will therefore be discussed in Chapter 7, which focuses on the twentieth century.

This chapter begins by looking at the general trends in the Highland property market in the early to mid-nineteenth century, before introducing James Matheson and discussing his motivations for purchase of the island in 1844. The chapter then looks at Matheson's interest in Agricultural Improvement, which led to the second lotting, and at his interest in social and cultural reform. The methods he employed in order to bring about housing change are then discussed. This chapter then turns to look at the impact of the various Royal Commission reports that were published during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and at the local authorities and their attempts to encourage housing change during the 1890s. There follows a discussion of the socio-cultural changes that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century, during which there were periods of poverty and of relative prosperity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of tenants' attitudes towards housing and settlement change.

6.1 The Transfer of Highland Estates

Between 1820 and 1860, a large number of Highland estates, which had been in the possession of landed families for generations, were sold (Devine 1989: 109). As

mentioned in the previous chapter, many Highland landowners were labouring under debt at this time and in many cases proprietors had no option but to sell all or part of their estates. Although the economic climate in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars had affected the market throughout the rest of Britain, there was, in fact, a great demand for Highland estates. Despite the financial difficulties of the region, the estate prices had risen and there were many interested buyers, not only from the Highlands, but also from the Lowlands and from England (Devine 1989: 122-23). Devine suggests a number of reasons for this unusual trend. Firstly, the region had become by this time 'a source of wool, mutton and cheap labour' (ibid.: 123) for southern and eastern Scotland. Industrialisation, supplied by the north and west, led to 'enormous surpluses' (ibid.: 124) in the south and east, which were 'concentrated in the possession of the wealthy entrepreneurial and rentier classes, which were then redeployed in the purchase of land now more available in the north because of the economic disasters which had overwhelmed the Highland region' (ibid.: 124).

This alone, however, does not adequately explain such an interest in land ravaged by famine and of seemingly little financial benefit: 'The purchase of landed estates in general, and perhaps in particular land in the Highlands in the nineteenth century, hardly seems to reflect rational economic self-interest' (Devine 1989: 124). There had to have been another reason. Devine suggests that permanence, rather than profit, was the main motivation behind many estate purchases, providing both a 'secure investment' and 'a passive source of rentier income' (ibid.: 124-25). This was particularly true in areas where sheep farming and deer forests had taken hold as they 'yielded regular rentals' which were easy to collect (ibid.: 125). This also led to some purchasers buying estates only to re-sell for profit once they had introduced sheep farming or deer forests, 'transforming them into highly profitable assets by investing in them and assiduously applying the techniques of Lowland "improvement" to their administration' (ibid.: 125).

One other important element, however, in explaining this phenomenon, was the changing perception of the Highlands that had spread throughout Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Romantic Movement had taken hold,

and whereas, before the mid-eighteenth century, the Highlands had been seen as 'a barren and sterile wilderness, inhabited by a barbarous population' (Devine 1989: 126), by the early to mid-nineteenth century, the area had become associated with romance and mystery. This newfound vision of the Highlands, combined with the rise in sporting facilities and improvements in transport, made the area not only desirable, but also much more accessible (ibid.: 127-28). Whereas estates in the south were rarely for sale, and were, in any case, considerably more expensive than Highland estates, the purchase of a Highland estate now offered considerable status in social circles:

> It mattered not that much of the land was useless because its main function may have been simply to satisfy the urge for territorial possession. It became a form of conspicuous consumption, a means by which material success could be demonstrated, status and place in society assured and a family line established. In this sense, buying a Highland estate and "improving" it gratified the same passion for possession as the collection of fine art or the acquisition of expensive and elaborate furniture (Devine 1989: 129).

6.2 James Sutherland Matheson

James Sutherland Matheson was born at Shiness, in Lairg, in 1796. He was the second son of Donald Matheson, Captain-Lieutenant in the Earl of Sutherland's Fencible Regiment and head of the Mathesons of Shiness (MacKenzie 1882: 470-71). His family had held land in Shiness as a wadset[57] from the Earls of Sutherland for centuries until it was reclaimed by the Duchess of Sutherland in 1809 as part of her efforts to consolidate land (Richards 1999: 41).

Matheson was educated in Inverness and Edinburgh before travelling to London, and then on to Calcutta and China where he made his fortune trading in opium (MacKenzie 1882: 490). Matheson purchased two estates in Lairg, at Achany and Gruids, before his return to Britain in 1842. These estates had been a part of the Sutherland Clearances which had begun in earnest at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with Gruids having been cleared by 1821 (Richards 1999: 243). After the death of Stewart MacKenzie in 1843, ownership of Lewis fell once again to his wife.

[57] Wadsetters were tenants who, having loaned money to the clan chief or proprietor, had acquired land free of tenure as security until the loan was repaid. This land was called the wadset. (Smout 1973: 128-29; Devine 2000: 174).

She sold the island to James Matheson in 1844 for the sum of £190,000 (MacKenzie 1903: 494).

Given Matheson's family background, and the social climate of the time, it is very likely that, in the purchase of the estates in Lairg, he was, in some way, trying to redeem his family name by the purchase of estates where his family had once held land. His purchase of Lewis may also have had much to do with raising his family's status. The estates in Lairg had been 'improved' some twenty years earlier, and Matheson had great plans for Improvement in Lewis. The amount of money he spent on improvements in Lewis, and his attempts to alleviate famine in the island during the second half of the 1840s (as will be discussed below), certainly proved to be socially advantageous to himself: in 1850 he was awarded the title Baronet (MacKenzie 1882: 502), and from 1847-1868 he represented Ross and Cromarty in the House of Commons (ibid.: 471). Matheson certainly seems to have devoted more of his time to his Lewis estate than to his estates elsewhere, living there for eight or nine months of the year (ibid.: 51).

Although seen by some as a generous man, and certainly given to philanthropic deeds,[58] accounts of the Matheson era in Lewis are varied.[59] While Matheson certainly spent a large amount of money on various improvements on the island, such as roads and land-reclamation, few were to the benefit of the tenants. Those improvements that did benefit them, they paid for by increases in rent or by paying interest on loans. When questioned before the Napier Commission, during their inquiry into the *Condition of the Crofters and Cotters in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* in 1883, Dr. Charles MacRae stated that he was 'not aware of any improvements on land but what rent has been charged for' (Napier 1884: 1084). In other words, those improvements that were of benefit to the crofters, were not asked for, or necessarily wanted, by the tenants, and led to an increase in rent.

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[58] After his return to Britain he donated money to the Royal Caledonian Asylum in London, the Academy of Tain, and the Northern District Lunatic Asylum in Inverness, and seems to have collected money for these causes amongst his friends and relatives (MacKenzie 1882: 495).

[59] See MacKenzie (1882), Devine (1988: 212-25), MacDonald (1990: 39-49), and Buchanan (1996: 7-21).

The differing accounts of Matheson may be partly explained by a statement made to the Napier Commission by Stornoway solicitor Napier Campbell, who commented that although Matheson was 'a great man, a public benefactor, a resolute pioneer of progress, the architect of his own colossal fortunes, most hospitable, and sometimes profusely benevolent' (Napier 1884: 201), he was also 'peculiarly accessible to flattery through the public press' and 'any one who could write local articles was speedily secured and patronised. Their constant theme was laudation of the proprietor' (ibid.: 201). It was for these reasons, according to Campbell, that the tenants' view of Matheson seemed to differ from the view of the general public. Tenants in Lewis seeking appeal were left to deal with his lawyers, who 'enjoyed an exclusive monopoly of all local influence and power, and who zealously exercised it' (ibid.: 201). Estate policy, bemoaned Campbell, under all of Matheson's Factors, was 'a tortuous, subtle, and aggressive one in pursuit of territorial aggrandisement and despotic power, so absolute and arbitrary as to be *almost universally* complained of' (ibid.: 201, italics in original). In fact, evidence given by crofters before the Napier Commission suggests that rather than objecting personally to the proprietor or Lady Matheson, it was the Chamberlain and Ground Officers they generally disapproved of (e.g. Napier 1884: 995, 1010).

6.3 The Second Lotting

Matheson began his 'improvements' in Lewis almost immediately after his purchase of the island, with the reclamation of land, the survey of the estate, and, between 1849 and 1851, the second lotting. Matheson's decision to re-lot probably stemmed from his desire to reclaim vast areas of moor-land and bring them under cultivation. He was particularly interested in Agricultural Improvement, and on his arrival in Lewis, Matheson engaged the services of Alexander Smith, a noted agriculturalist from Deanston in Perthshire, to survey the island and to advise him on Agricultural Improvement. This he did, and in 1845 work on reclaiming peat-covered land for agricultural purposes was begun. The second lotting followed shortly afterwards. In 1846, Matheson put money forward to encourage surveyors from the Ordnance Survey to begin their survey of the Western Isles in Lewis (Seymour 1980: 110).

The survey was carried out between 1848 and 1852, during which time the whole island was re-lotted and re-rented (Napier 1884: 160, 892, 959, 1096). Less than half of the reclaimed land was given over to crofters, however, the rest being added onto farms (ibid.: 197-98), and after the townships had been re-lotted, they were 'rented anew at what they were considered worth' (ibid.: 1091). John Munro Mackenzie, who was Chamberlain at the time, told the Napier Commission that

> generally there was an increase of rent of 10 to 12 per cent., which I did not think too much, considering the altered circumstances of the estate, brought about by the making of roads, regular steam communication, fencing, and other improvements (Napier 1884: 2204).

Re-lotting also gave Matheson the opportunity to resettle some of the tenants (for example tenants living around Seaforth Lodge had to be moved before he began building Lews Castle), and to re-allocate portions of land for deer forests, such as at Scaliscro and Morsgail (Brand 1902: lxx). It would also have allowed Matheson to plan where he wanted to build roads on the island, and to re-settle townships appropriately. The new lots, and houses, in Bragar may have been so positioned in anticipation of a new township road.

From information presented by MacKinlay in his 1878 publication, *The Island of Lewis and its Fishermen-Crofters*, we can gain some idea of how the lotting process worked from the tenants' point of view. Two quotes in particular are of interest here. Firstly, '[i]n Mr. Munro Mackenzie's time there was what is called a set of the hamlet or township of Coll, and at this set a lot, numbered 16, fell to Macdonald' (MacKinlay 1878: xxxvi), and secondly, '[a] man went and drew a ticket with his lot and his rent on it, and he had to take it and build a new house' (ibid.: 19). It seems, therefore, that lots were created, rents were attached to them, and that tenants literally 'drew lots' in order to determine which lot would be theirs. This process of awarding lots was called a 'set'. Tenants, therefore, would have had little say in the lots they were given. However, given that arable land under the pre-lotting system of runrig was divided in this way, it is possible that the tenants themselves, rather than the proprietor or Chamberlain, decided on this method of distribution.

In evidence to the Napier Commission, Munro MacKenzie, Chamberlain during the second lotting, stated that he himself was involved in the lotting process:

> I personally went over every croft in the island, accompanied by a man of skill, heard what the people had to say as to the way the land had been divided, rental, &c. In many cases the mode of division was altered to meet their views; in some cases the rental was reduced, and others left the same (Napier 1844: 3304).

That he 'heard what the people had to say', indicates that they had some influence in the way the lots were rearranged. While describing the distribution of lots in Lower Barvas, 'running in a narrow strip from the back of the village [...] to the sea, more than half-a-mile distant' (MacKinlay 1878: 18), the Scotsman Commissioner[60] states that

> [t]his arrangement of the land would at first sight seem an awkward one; but it is, I am told, necessary for the satisfaction of the people themselves. An important consideration with them is that they should have for sea-ware a certain breadth of beach opposite the end of their lots (cited in MacKinlay 1878: 18-19).

The first lots in Bragar ran parallel to the sea, which would have meant the tenants furthest away from the sea would have had to cross their neighbours lots (or alternatively use the path at the end of the lots, i.e. *An t-Sràid bho Thuath* and *An t-Sràid bho Dheas*) in order to collect seaweed for manure or to feed the cattle. The new lots in Bragar, ran perpendicular to the sea, as they did in Lower Barvas, suggesting that perhaps tenants in Bragar did have some say in the layout of the new lots.

A statement by Munro MacKenzie in McNeill's *Report* of 1851 also informs us that the sub-division of lots, whereby two or more tenants, usually members of the same family, came to be living on a lot intended for only one tenant, had already taken place prior to the second lotting and that these lots were re-arranged so as to give each tenant his own piece of land:

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[60] The Scotsman Commissioner was the 'Special Commissioner on the Highland and Island Crofters' appointed by the Scotsman newspaper. MacKinlay (1878: 15) describes him as 'a gentleman connected with some of the large farmers in the South of Scotland – to whom small farmers and crofters are an abomination.' In 1878, a series of letters from the Commissioner was published in the Scotsman newspaper and, while his prejudicial attitude towards crofters is apparent in his writing and must be acknowledged, there is still a lot of useful information regarding the social condition of the tenants to be gleaned from his writings.

> The division of lots had been made about forty years ago; and, on a considerable number of them, it was found that two or three families had since settled, who either held the lot in common, or had divided it amongst them. In the townships that have been re-lotted, a separate lot has been assigned to each lotter. In some cases of aged couples, widows, and other persons, incapable of cultivating a large lot, the original lot has been sub-divided, so as to give to each of such persons the quantity of land they were capable of managing. But in no case are two families permitted to occupy the same lot (McNeill 1851: 93).

It will be shown below that this sub-division of lots continued after the second lotting.

6.4 Social and Cultural Reform and their Relation to Housing

As well as re-lotting and re-renting the island, re-claiming peat-land, introducing roads, and various other developments in Stornoway and the surrounding area, Matheson was also interested in social and cultural reform. This seems to have focused on the areas of education, sanitation, gender issues, housing, and agricultural practices.

Matheson was extremely keen on education, setting up a number of new schools on the island and contributing to the wages of a number of school-masters (Napier 1884: 1092). He saw schooling as a method of educating the people not only in scholarly pursuits for their own sake, but also as a means to social and cultural improvement. In 1869, he spoke at the opening of a new schoolhouse at Lionel, stating his hopes that it would 'prove the commencement of a new era in the northern extremity of this remote island, by affording increased facilities for the extension of light and improvement among its inhabitants' (Matheson 1869: 2).

Matheson's speech at Lionel also provides us with a valuable insight into his personal views on the above mentioned areas of society and culture which he deemed to be in need of improvement. He urges the pupils to 'cultivate morality, steadiness, courtesy, kindliness, gentleness, forbearance, and unselfishness' (Matheson 1869: 3) and, on the subject of sanitation, expresses that 'I would wish you to be clean and neat in your persons, bearing in mind that cleanliness is next to godliness' (ibid.: 3).

Matheson then moves on to address his 'older hearers, parents and others' (ibid.: 3), on the place of women in society, urging them

> to do away with the stain on the Lewsman's character, in your habit of making the woman, who is the weaker vessel, do so much of the hard work and heavy manual labour – carrying heavy burdens, and often carrying their husbands on their backs across rivers or arms of the sea.
>
> A man should be ashamed to see a woman made to labour, while he, himself, is standing idle. It is only in the most backward countries that such a state of things can exist.
>
> (Matheson 1869: 4)

It is interesting that, while expounding his views on housing, Matheson also brings up the subject of sleeping arrangements between the sexes:

> Seeing so many heads of families present, I will take the opportunity of remarking, that it is high time there should be an improvement in the style of your dwellings.
>
> From the low, unsightly appearance of your dwellings, and the muddy approach usually outside of the door, strangers can hardly believe that human beings live in them. Still more is this the case on entering the hut, to see human beings and cattle huddled together, with scarcely any light except from a fire in the middle of the floor, and no vent but a hole in the roof, through which the smoke issues, after filling your hut to the injury of your eyesight. I am happy to observe that some improved dwellings have recently sprung up in various parts of the island, and that you can point out recent improvements among yourselves. If you cannot excel, try to imitate these examples of improvement, so that it may be seen that you are in no respect inferior to the crofters on the mainland; among whom it is considered indispensable that in every dwelling there should be three sleeping apartments – one for the parents, another for the boys, and a third for the girls, besides a shed, with a separate entrance for cattle and other animals.
>
> I have given orders to the ground-officers not to sanction any new dwellings to be built without this extent of accommodation.
>
> (Matheson 1869: 4-5)

Matheson also takes this opportunity to advise the people on the unnecessary waste involved in cultivating their land through the use of lazy-beds, stating that he would do his utmost to abolish the practice:

> One word more about your faulty mode of tilling the land on the lazy-bed system, leaving a broad vacant space between each rig, by which nearly a-half of your land remains comparatively unproductive. I am aware this is done for the sake of drainage. It is, however, wholly unnecessary for this purpose, as you can judge from the large and well-tilled fields of the tacksmen around you; and I have given orders to the ground-officers to do all in their power to abolish the lazy-bed system of tillage (Matheson 1869: 6).

Each of the above quotes deserves further examination. With regard to sanitation, Matheson sought to improve both personal hygiene, and the sanitary conditions of the houses. It was believed that only through improving the condition of the houses, would personal hygiene be improved. For example, in 1885, Lord Napier commented to the *Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes* that 'the habits of neatness and cleanliness, which it is so desirable to introduce amongst the Highlanders, are very difficult to observe in habitations which are habitually contaminated by every description of dirt' (Dilke 1885: 104).

With regard to gender issues, Matheson, and many other visitors to the island, were shocked by the apparent treatment of women in the society. Women did much of the heavy work on the croft, and at times could be seen hard at work when the men were resting. Men were also often seen as being lazy due to their reluctance to take up work for the proprietor, or seasonal work on the mainland. Both these assumptions often led to the supposition that the women were over-worked and that the men were not willing to do their share. A *Report on the Outer Hebrides* by the Highland Relief Board in 1849 stated that 'the females seemed no better than slaves, working hard at out-door labour, carrying manure on creels on their backs, and doing work which is elsewhere that of the lower animals' (HRB 1849: 14), and MacKinlay (1878: lix) described Lewis women as 'beasts of burden'. In his book, *Children of the Black-house*, Calum Ferguson challenges this idea, through the words of his mother:

> Outsiders visiting Lewis sometimes described island men as 'lazy'. So far as the great majority of our menfolk were concerned, that description was wholly unjustified. It is true that island woman took as much of the burden of croft work as she possibly could. But, in the history of our island, so many of our menfolk were drowned at sea, taken by press-gangs, or killed in battles all over the world, that the woman wanted to protect her man as much as possible while he was at home. After all, the man was not only the father of her children but also the family's protector and breadwinner. From my early childhood, I was taught that there were some things that a woman could do much better than a man could – and, of course, vice versa. Tradition demanded that no man should carry a creel on his back or do any form of housework. When Murdo Campbell of Ceanna-loch began to break down those taboos, the busybodies of the village tut-tutted for weeks! (Ferguson 2003: 225-26).

The practice of women carrying their menfolk over streams was picked up by another author, John Wilson, who was a school-inspector in the 1870s and 1880s and

who visited Lewis regularly. He also clearly disproved of the practice, although he offers some insight as to why it was done:

> It was customary to see women crossing the moors barefooted, but a man was rarely seen without boots on his feet. To save her husband the trouble of taking them off, when a stream had to be forded his wife transported him in her creel. Seeing this, I often wished that the *ithish* or straw rope across her breast would snap and let the unmanly burden drop into the water (Wilson 1928: 125-26).

Stevens (1925: 87) also comments that it was once common for the women to carry the men out to their boats, 'so that they might start the night's fishing dry'.

It should be noted that these differences of opinion about the role of men and women in the society, were cultural differences between the islanders and those from outside the island (including Matheson). As stated in Chapter 1, beliefs and practices which are acceptable in one culture, are not necessarily acceptable in another. In this case the 'outsiders' considered their beliefs and practices to be 'civilised' and the beliefs and practices of the islanders to be 'uncivilised'. It was this radical divergence of opinion between two distinct cultures, two distinct *genres de vie*, that prompted Matheson to introduce change in these areas.

The belief that there should be separate sleeping spaces for the different sexes was one in which these cultural differences became obvious. In the society and culture of the 'outsider', different sexes sharing beds would be seen as inevitably leading to immorality. This was not the case in Lewis where strong cultural constraints were in place to prevent such abuses.[61] In fact, in 1862, the percentage of illegitimate births was lower in Ross and Cromarty than in any other county in Scotland at the time, with the exception of Orkney, which it equalled (Nicolson 1866: 128). Despite the statistics, however, it was generally believed that improved housing would benefit the people's health and morals, as Lord Napier explained to the Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes:

> If the people in the Highlands and islands are on the whole healthy and moral, it is in spite of the condition of their dwellings, and in consequence of certain counteracting influences in their lives; and if they had better dwellings, one of the natural impediments to health and to morality (though not very operative) would be removed. If they had better dwellings we may presume that they might be more healthy and more moral. But, besides that, it is to be considered

[61] These will be discussed in Chapter 7.

> that better dwellings would introduce into the lives of the people, I think, greater comfort, greater serenity, and greater sources of general ease and welfare (Dilke 1885: 104).

In fact, Napier considered that improvement in all other areas of society and culture, were dependent upon improved housing and that improving the tenants' houses was 'an inseparable concomitant of all other improvements' (Dilke 1885: 105). He thus comments that:

> You could not have the present dwellings with improved cultivation, and you could not have improved cultivation with the present buildings. If agricultural improvements, fencing, gardening, and improvements of that sort, are to be introduced, it can only be done in connexion with improved dwellings and improved farm offices or habitations for the stock. In fact, improved dwellings must go on *pari passu* with all other improvements; and no great social elevation or economical development can take place in the Highlands and islands, to my mind, without improved dwellings (Dilke 1885: 105).

6.5 Matheson and Housing Change

Matheson's attempts to improve housing in Lewis in the mid-to-late nineteenth century involved creating Articles in the Estate Regulations stating the standards to which all new houses must be built and offering incentives in the way of leases to all tenants who abided by these regulations. He also offered 'loans in the shape of money or materials', without interest, to tenants who were willing to build improved houses (Napier 1884: 157), and meal was given to tenants for the duration of their involvement in the house-building process (ibid.: 967; 972).

In 1849, around fifteen or twenty years after Stewart MacKenzie's *Articles of Set*, Matheson's *Rules of the Lews Estate*, was published. Article 48 of this reads:

> Feumaidh an Tuath na taighean-còna idh a tha an co-cheangal ri'n aontaichean a thogail air an gabhailean fa leth, do chlach 'us aol, no do chlach 'us criadhach, geinnte le clach 'us aol, air neo far nach 'eil clachan goireasach, le fàl no seòl togail eile a chithear iomchuidh, agus bithidh mullaichean nan taighean air an còmhdach gu dion le criadh-leac, no le fraoch, no connlaich; bithidh ùrlar an taigh-chònaidh ceithir eòrlaich dheug os ceann an talmhainn air an taobh a muigh, agus bithidh dorus aig an tagh-chònaidh air leth o dhorsan nam bàthaichean, no taighean na spreidhe, agus balla-dealachaidh eatorra, chum gu'm bi dol a steach 's a mach do na taighean-còna idh ni's fhurasd' na le bhi dol troimh bhàthaichean no stàbuil; bithidh mar an ceudna àitean cadail fa eth aig na firionaich o na boirionnaich. Bithidh àirde dà throigh do chloiche mar stèidh aig na taighean a tha'n taobh muigh do'n taigh-chònaidh, agus togar a chuid eile

> do na ballachan le fàl no air sheòl eile a chithear iomchaidh, agus tuthar iad le connlaich 'us criadhach, no le fraoch, mur bi atharrachadh dòigh air a shònrachadh leis an Uachdaran no'n Seamarlan.
>
> Tenants must build the houses which are attached to their leases, on their respective lots, of stone and lime, or of stone and clay, pinned with stone and lime, or where stones are not convenient, with turf or by any other method of building deemed appropriate, and the roofs of the houses to be covered so as to be wind and water tight with tiles, or with heather, or straw; the floor of the dwelling house to be fourteen inches above the ground outside, and the door of the dwelling house to be separate from the door used by the cattle, or the byre, and a partition to be between them, so that the entrance and exit to the dwelling house is easier than going through the byre or stable; also the men and the women to have separate sleeping places. The base of the walls of houses outside the dwelling-house shall be of stone to a height of two feet, the rest of the walls to be built with turf or any other by method deemed appropriate, and they shall be thatched with straw and clay, or with heather, unless an alternative method is specified by the Proprietor or the Chamberlain (this author's translation).

This Article includes two points of instructions that were not present in the *Articles of Set* attributed to Stewart MacKenzie, namely the materials used for the construction of the walls and roof, and the 'separate sleeping spaces' for men and women. Like MacKenzie, Matheson also asserted that there was to be a separate entrance for the cattle and a partition between the byre and the living ends of the dwelling house. Interestingly, there is no mention of windows, and it therefore seems unlikely that a previous set of Articles would have existed, written by Stewart MacKenzie, in which every house was to have at least one window, as the minister of Stornoway implied in 1833 (*NSA* 1841: 129). It is more likely that any such additional set of Articles was written specifically for the town of Stornoway.

That Matheson's improvements were slow to be adopted by the tenants is confirmed and supported by the descriptions of Lewis houses of the 1860s published by Thomas (1867) and Mitchell (1880), and by various writers of Highland and Island affairs in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Anderson Smith (1886) and MacKinlay (1878).

In his *Report on the State of Education in the Hebrides* in 1866, Sheriff Alexander Nicolson commented that

> [a]ttempts have been made by Sir James to encourage the rearing of partition walls between the two divisions of the establishment, and prizes have been offered for the best kept dwellings. These benevolent efforts have, however, had little effect as yet, the immovable attachment to old ways, simply as such, making the people prefer the mode of life practised by their fathers to anything different, however obviously better. In no part of the Hebrides, indeed, has there been so little improvement on old habits (Nicolson 1866: 12).

Furthermore, those houses that *were* improved in the late 1840s or early 1850s, were soon changed back to their former state. Munro MacKenzie, who was Chamberlain during the second lotting commented that

> some of the people built better houses, with windows, chimneys, and divisions between them and their cattle, as provided by the estate regulations, on which they were to be granted leases; they got assistance in the shape of lime and other material, and an allowance of meal, while they were employed building, from the Destitution Committee, but almost in every case these houses were soon changed to the old style – divisions pulled down, windows blocked up, and chimneys put out of use (Napier 1884: 3304).[62]

The same was true of houses improved in the 1870s. William Mackay, Chamberlain during the period of investigation by the Napier Commission, explained that houses that were improved in 1872 also reverted to their old state shortly afterwards:

> In 1872 the crofters in the township of Barvas were made to build improved houses, with two doors and a division between the dwelling-house and the byre, and doors, windows, and other woodwork was supplied by the proprietor, to be repaid as the crofters could do so; but these houses were no time occupied when they closed one of the doors, and they went back to their old habit of having one entrance for the inmates and the cattle. The same thing occurred in other townships as well as Barvas (Napier 1884: 163).

James Matheson died in France in 1878, at the age of 82. He was buried in Lairg, Sutherland, and his estates fell to his wife, Lady Matheson (MacKenzie 1882: 503). In 1879, thirty years after the first set of *Rules* was published, a second set was printed, in Matheson's name.[63] Article 2 of *Rules and Regulations of Lews Estate, in Gaelic and English* (1879) concerns housing and reads:

> Tha na tighean comhnuidh a chuirear suas leis an Tuath air an seilbhean fa leth, gu bhi air an togail le clach us aol, no le clach us criadh, geinnt agus

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[62] Interestingly, this quote, by Munro MacKenzie who was Chamberlain at the time of the second lotting, mentions the use of windows, which were not included in Matheson's 1849 estate *Rules*. He was not talking about any particular parish. Given that he goes on to describe an improved house that he himself had supplied plans for, it might be assumed that windows were not among the required improvements at that time, and that they perhaps were not as widely adopted as this quote leads us to believe.

[63] Presumably Matheson had approved the new set of *Rules and Regulations* before he died.

comhdaichte le aol, no le clach air an taobh amach, us ceap no fal air an taobh stigh, agus bithidh mullaichean nan tighean air an còmhdach le sgleat, no criadhleac no connlach, no fraoch air muin sgrathan; agus bi cead air an Tuath sgrathan us fraoch a bhuain airson an fheum seo, ach a main sna h aitean a chomharaicheas maor na sgire no na cearnaidh sin. Bithidh anns gach tigh, da sheomar an car is lugha, le uinneag ghloine am balla gach aon diubh, agus mar an ceudna seòmar beag no closaid; bithidh siomlairean anns na cinnbhallachan, no farleus, no fosglaidh eile sa mhullach airson na deataich; cha toirear an tubhadh dheth 'n tigh airson inneir; togar a bhàthaich le dorus air leth aig ceann no air culthaobh an tighcomhnuidh, mar is fearr a fhreagras do'n laraich. Anns a bhàthaich nithear guitear no cladhan airson an inneir, as an togar e gu pongail dh'ionnsuidh otrach mach o'n tigh. Mu ni Tuathanach sam bith fo aont no gun aont, a leithid so do thigh a thogail, a bheir riarachadh do'n Uachdaran no da Sheamarlan, gheibh e, mu dhlealaicheas e ri sheilbh, no ma chuirear as e, duais leasachaidh airson a shaothair o'n Uachdaran, no naithsan a thig na ait, mar a shuidhicheas luchd-meas air an taghadh taobh air thaobh.

The dwelling-houses to be erected by the tenants on their respective possessions shall be built of stone and lime, or of stone and clay pinned and harled with lime, or with stone on the outside face, and turf or sod on the inside, and roofed with slates, tiles or straw, or heather with divots, which heather and divots the tenants shall have liberty to take for this purpose from such places only as shall be pointed out to them by the ground officer of the district; each house to have at least two apartments, with a glazed window in the wall of each, and a closet or small room, with chimneys in the gables, or other opening for the smoke in the roof; the thatch or covering not to be stripped off or removed for manure; the byre to be built at the end or the back of the dwelling-house, as the site may admit, and to have a separate entrance. In the byre a gutter to be formed for the manure, which shall be regularly removed to a dungheap outside. Any tenant, whether possessing a lease or not, who shall build such a house to the satisfaction of the proprietor or his factor, shall, in the event of his being removed, or otherwise quitting the croft, be allowed meliorations for the same by the proprietor or incoming tenant, at the valuation of parties to be mutually chosen.

(Matheson 1879: 4, 5)

By comparing these two Articles, written thirty years apart, we are able to discern certain similarities and difference between the two. Differences include Matheson's assertion, in the second set of *Rules and Regulations*, that each house have 'at least two apartments' and also 'a closet or small room', that each apartment have a glazed window in the wall, that there be some method of smoke extraction in the roof, that the thatch not be removed and used as manure, and that the manure from the byre be removed regularly.

This seems to have been the first time that glazed windows in the walls were mentioned in estate Regulations, and suggests that, at this time, glazed windows were not common in these houses. It also suggests that in the majority of houses the

thatch was still being stripped off the roof and used as fertilizer, that the smoke was therefore allowed to make its way out through the thatch, and that the manure was only removed from the byre once a year. Matheson's insistence that the byre be built 'at the end or the back of' the house, and that it 'have a separate entrance' may indicate that earlier attempts to introduce a partition between the byre and the living area, and a separate doorway for the cattle, had not been completely successful. In prescribing that every house have at least two rooms Matheson probably meant that every house should have a living room and a separate sleeping room. This therefore implies that there should be a second partition in the house – between the living and sleeping areas. That he does not mention separate sleeping spaces in this Article, may be because, with the introduction of box beds in the mid-nineteenth century, each house had at least two or three beds and segregation had already occurred. Alternatively, Matheson had decided that such an assertion was not necessary to the improved social and moral condition of the tenants.

Evidence given before various Royal Commissions in the late nineteenth century shows that, in most cases, houses were not improved after the 1879 set of *Rules and Regulations*. For example, in 1890, Lewis houses were described as follows:

> In the great majority of cases in the Lews, and in some instances in the other islands, the byre in which the cattle are kept is not separated by any partition from the house in which the people live. The only entrance to the dwelling is through the byre; the floor is the ground on which the house is built. There is no chimney, and the smoke from the peat fire in the centre of the dwelling finds its way through the thatched roof. The byre is only cleansed when the manure is required for the croft; the drainage from the byre is frequently allowed to accumulate in a ditch round the dwelling; and the people are too indifferent to cut a channel to allow it to run away (Walpole 1890: 6-7).

6.6 The Third Settlement Shift

The third settlement shift in Bragar occurred at some point between 1852 and 1895, when the island was re-surveyed by the Ordnance Survey. The new maps were published in 1897 (at 1:2500) and 1898 (at 1:10,560). As mentioned in Chapter 2, this shift did not involve the whole Bragar township, but the whole of North Bragar, and the majority of houses in South Bragar from around lot 42 to the boundary with

North Bragar, in which the houses were moved inland by between 20-100m (see Map 8 and Map 9, Chapter 2). A number of other houses in South Bragar appear to have been moved, built, or amended during this time. While some of the Phase 4 houses would have been built during this third settlement shift, others may have been built before or after the shift.

Although no evidence has so far come to light as to the precise timing of this move, a number of important events occurred during this period, and it is likely that one, or a combination, of them resulted in this third settlement shift. The 1879 *Rules and Regulations* offered leases until 1893, with no increase in rent, if tenants executed the required improvements on their land and in their houses. However evidence suggests that, in most cases, the required improvements were not carried out and new houses were not built.

With the passing of the Western Highlands and Islands (Scotland) Works Act in 1891, around four and a half thousand pounds was spent on building roads and footpaths in the island in 1893-94 and in 1896-97. Many township roads were built during this time, including roads in North and South Bragar (Brand 1902: 25-30, xlvii-li). It is unclear, however, whether the houses were moved to be closer to the road, or whether the houses had already been moved when the roads were built. The former, perhaps, seems more likely.

The other important change to take place between 1852 and 1895 was the Royal Commission *Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Napier 1884), and the subsequent Crofters Holdings Act of 1886. This Act finally guaranteed the islanders legal security of tenure, and thus some incentive to improve their land and houses. It could be that it was not until after 1886 that the third settlement shift took place. However, as mentioned above, in 1872 crofters in Barvas and in other townships throughout the island were made to build improved houses (Napier 1884: 163). It is possible that this was when this third shift happened.

One other point worth mentioning is that in North Bragar, at some time between 1852 and 1895, and possibly when the road was built, some of the common grazing land was reclaimed and added to the lots. It would have made sense for the tenants to have re-built their houses at the top of the lot (i.e. the end of the lot furthest from the sea), to allow for maximum use of the available land.

With the first lotting having taken place in Bragar in the early nineteenth century, and the second lotting in the mid-nineteenth century, it may be assumed that, if this third shift, which took place sometime in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, was ordered by the proprietor (rather than on the tenants' own initiative), tenants would have complied somewhat unwillingly with this further disruption.

6.7 The Royal Commissions

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Highlands and Islands came to the notice of various national authorities with the result that, in the 1880s in particular, and also in the 1890s, a number of Reports were commissioned, to look at various aspects of Highland and Island life.

6.7.1 The Housing of the Working Classes

In 1884, a Commission was established, chaired by Sir Charles Dilke, to inquire into the Housing of the Working Classes throughout the United Kingdom. That the Commission was established in the first place shows that authorities were beginning to pay more attention to the housing of the lower classes and to recognise the need to improve housing, and the right for everyone to live in a decent house. It also implies that there was some perception of a minimum standard of living:

> With the further progress of sanitary science and the growing sense of the importance of the subject of ameliorating the condition of the working classes, and with the increase of the population to provide more house-room, a Commission was appointed in 1884-85 to inquire into the matter (Kaufman 1975: 11).

The evidence gathered for the Scottish *Report* (Dilke 1885) gives a useful commentary on the housing and social conditions of the time, although it is worth

noting that the sittings were all held in Edinburgh, and although a various witnesses from throughout Scotland were examined, no Lewis crofters were interviewed.

Prior to 1885, the Public Health (Scotland) Act (1867) was the main Act dealing with public health in Scotland. Under this Act, the Parochial Boards, under the direction of the Board of Supervision, were responsible for dealing with insanitary housing in rural areas (Dilke 1885: 3). The Commission found, however, that although reports made by the General Superintendent of the Poor for Ross and Cromarty, in his role as Sanitary Inspector, were sent to the Board of Supervision, and in some cases passed down to the relevant Parochial Board, very little, in anything, came of them (Dilke 1885: 92-97).

The recommendations of the Commission, adopted in the 1885 Housing of the Working Classes Act, which made provision for the erection of new dwellings and the improved supervision of insanitary dwellings, are summarised by Kaufman (1975: 35):

> A more efficient supervision of the sanitary conditions of the people's dwellings by medical officers of health residing in the district, the appointment of a better staff of sanitary inspectors; the adoption of suitable by-laws for each district for their guidance in building operations; greater facilities for the erection of dwellings where needed by the local authorities, with the help of cheap Government Loans.

However, this Act, and its 1890 amendment Act, seem to have had little effect in the Highlands and Islands due to a lack of legislation for improvement to housing in the area. In other words, it was all very well to dismantle unsanitary dwellings, but there was no provision, in rural areas, for the erection of new dwellings or for the improvement of existing dwellings, other than that which the proprietor was willing to offer. As the Commission had discovered, the Lewis proprietor's provision for improved dwellings amounted to nothing more than 'a gracious permission to the tenants to build themselves a house at their own expense' (Dilke 1885: 94). This situation was not remedied by legislation through the Acts of 1885 and 1890 and thus the housing situation in the Highlands and Islands remained relatively unchanged.

6.7.2 The Napier Commission and the Crofters Act

In 1886, an Act was introduced that, while it did not relate directly to housing in the Highlands and Islands, nevertheless, is believed to have had a significant effect on the development of housing in the following decades.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands was established in 1883, under the leadership of Lord Napier. A growing population had left the Highlanders short of land and had led to the sub-division of lots and the building of houses on common grazing land. Those tenants who built houses on their parents' lots were known as 'cottars', while those who built houses on the townships' common grazing, without the proprietors' consent, were known as 'squatters'. Requests to their proprietors for more land, particularly land which had been taken from them decades earlier and given over to sheep or deer, had been refused and crofters had begun to take matters into their own hands by settling themselves and their stock on land which had been taken from them. The Napier Commission was established as a result of this land agitation, which had begun in Lewis in 1874, and spread throughout the Highlands after the Battle of the Braes in April 1882, gaining support for crofters from all over Scotland, and further afield, from the ranks of the upper, middle, and lower social classes alike.[64]

During 1883 and 1884, the Commissioners travelled throughout the Highlands and Islands, gathering evidence from crofters, other tenants, factors, and land-owners, on the situation of land-holding, fishing, communication, education, justice, emigration, and, to some extent, housing. The *Report* of the Commission (1884) led to the establishment of the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886. Under this Act, crofters were to be granted 'security of tenure, a fixed fair rent, compensation for improvements, and facilities for enlargements of holdings' (Day 1918: 190). It also led to the formation of the Crofters Commission, under whose jurisdiction the Land Court fell. The Land Court had powers to fix rents and compensation, and to cancel arrears (Day 1918: 191-93). In Lewis, out of arrears of £40,979 18s. 1d., £30,092 7s.

[64] For more information on this period in Highland history, see MacAmhlaigh (1980), MacPhail (1989), and Buchanan (1996).

4d. (an average of £11 14s. per tenant) was cancelled, and the total rental was reduced by almost thirty two per cent, from £7,247 15s. 1d. to £4,944 1s. 8d. (Brand 1902: lxxviii).

With regard to housing improvements, the Napier Commission recognised that improved housing would not be successfully attained 'by precipitate and imperative legislation' (Napier 1884: 49). They understood that '[t]he process of amelioration must be prosecuted with deliberation and by mutual assistance, keeping in view the resources at the disposal of the proprietor, and the means, the habits, and the desires of the tenant' (ibid.: 50). Although no legislation was put in place to encourage improved housing as a result of the *Report*, or as a result of the Crofters Act, security of tenure, compensation for improvement, and a fixed rent are widely believed to have had a positive effect on the development of housing in the ensuing decades. However, we shall see below that the Crofters Act may not have had quite such a wide ranging effect on housing in Lewis as has been generally assumed.

6.7.3 The Condition of the Cottar Population in the Lews

In the late 1880s, a study was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Scotland to inquire into the Condition of the Cottar Population in Lewis. The plight of the cottar and squatter class of tenants had been highlighted by previous reports, as had the recent state of destitution on the island, which will be discussed below. The *Report* (Fraser and McNeill 1888) focuses on social issues in general, and includes the state of housing on the island. Sheriff Fraser and Malcolm McNeil held meetings with the Parochial Boards and visited one hundred and eight houses throughout the parishes of Lochs and Stornoway, where they questioned the tenants as to their means and possessions. This information is provided in an Appendix to the *Report*. This *Report* therefore is an extremely useful indication of both social and housing conditions in the island at the time.

6.7.4 The Walpole Commission and The Deer Forests Commission

Also worthy of mention are the Commission to Inquire into Certain Matters Affecting the Interests of the Population of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland,

chaired by Spencer Walpole (1890), and the Deer Forests Commission of 1892, chaired by David Brand. The Walpole Commission dealt mainly with the development of the fishing industry, and also with transport and communications. Their *Report* (Walpole 1890) led to the passing of the Western Highlands and Islands Works Act in 1891 which, in turn, led to financial assistance for a number of public works, such as the previously mentioned roads and footpaths (Day 1918: 326-27).

The Deer Forests Commission focused on land issues, discerning whether any land in the area, which was currently used for sporting purposes or grazing by proprietors or by large-scale farmers, could be of better use to crofters. Their *Report* (Brand 1895) found that, in Lewis, the tenants' situation had not considerably improved since the introduction of the Crofters Commission. Lots were still being sub-divided, and despite the reduction in rent granted by the Commission, many tenants were still in arrears. As attempts to encourage the population to emigrate had failed, it was agreed that the only solution to the overcrowding, was to create new holdings for the surplus tenants (Day 1918: 206). To this end, the Congested Districts Board was established in 1897, whose job it was to identify congested areas, and who had the authority to acquire land which they could then sell to crofters. They were also authorised to assist in the migration of those crofters who were willing to leave, and to aid in the construction of fishermen's holdings. The success of the Board was limited, however, due to a lack of funds, the crofters' lack of capital and unwillingness to purchase holdings, and their unwillingness to migrate (Day 1918: 208-12). In 1911, its duties were taken over by the newly established Board of Agriculture (Day 1918: 39-40). The role of the Board of Agriculture in Lewis will be discussed in Chapter 7.

6.8 Local Authorities

In 1889, under the Local Government (Scotland) Act, local administration was taken out of the hands of the landed gentry, and given to the newly elected County Councils. Most County Councils then delegated authority to various District Committees (Day 1918: 48-52). One of the tasks undertaken by Lewis District

Committee, among other District Committees, was the abolition of the byre-dwelling. To this effect, in 1893, the Committee agreed the following Minute:

> In regard to the dwelling-houses it was agreed to give notice to the people by a circular to each householder, that the Local Authority will insist henceforth that a wall of stone and lime reaching the roof be built in each dwelling-house, separating the cattle end of the house from the other portion with no internal communication and that each end be provided with a separate entrance from the outside and that everyone failing to carry out this regulation is liable to be summoned before the Sheriff (cited in Brand 1902: lxxxviii).[65]

In order to implement the regulation, the committee chose to set an example, and four cases were chosen and brought before the Sheriff. The defendants were ordered to execute the following improvements to their house within three months:

> *First*, To erect a gable of stone or brick with suitable mortar, and of not less than nine inches in thickness, between the dwelling-house and byre so as to leave no internal communication between the dwelling-house and byre – said gable to have a suitable fire-place in the face next the dwelling-house, with vent for same, and to be carried up clear of the roof so as to separate the roof of the byre from the roof of the dwelling-house, and finished with proper cope and chimney head; *Second*, To open in front wall of kitchen a window not less than three feet high by two feet six inches wide, and to be fitted up with suitable frame and glass so as to open on hinges or with double sash; and *Third*, To open a separate doorway and fit up same with suitable door for a separate entrance from outside to said byre (cited in Brand 1902: 38).[66]

In Harris, where similar procedures were undertaken, the District Committee oversaw the improvement proceedings and continued in their campaign by prosecuting twenty eight more offenders, from various townships throughout the island. Within two years, the number of byre-dwellings in Harris had reduced from 167 to 13 (Day 1918: 299-300). In Lewis, however, the legal proceedings were not enforced, nor were charges brought against any more defendants (Day 1918: 301-04; Ballantyne 1921).

In 1892, the Board of Supervision had recognised the 'quite exceptional difficulties' involved in legislating for improvement as

> [t]he people, as a rule, it is believed, are satisfied with, and even attached to, their miserable hovels, and it is impossible to change in a day the confirmed habits of a whole people. Nor, so far as the Board are aware, can it be said that the public health or the moral tone of these remote communities suffers in any appreciable degree from the want of better accommodation. The islanders in

[65] I have been unable to locate the original source for this quote.
[66] I have been unable to locate the original source for this quote.

> general are a hardy race, and epidemic diseases cannot be said to be more generally prevalent in the Islands than in other parts of the country. The Board are of the opinion that in these circumstances any proposal involving sudden or sweeping change would almost certainly tend to excite popular resentment and defeat the objects which the Board have in view. Moreover, the local assessments are already so oppressive in many of these districts that the imposition of further burdens even for the most excellent object is to be deprecated. The Board, therefore, are not prepared to advise the local authorities of the Western Isles to take measures in the meantime for the radical reconstruction of the dwellings of the labouring population (cited in Day 1918: 297).[67]

One might suppose from the phrase 'excite popular resentment', that perhaps the Board did not want to risk the chance of inducing any more agitations, like those which spread throughout the Islands during the 1880s.

In 1895-96 the Lewis District Committee, amongst other local authorities, applied to the Local Government Board for funding to improve housing on the island. They were subsequently informed that 'no hope could be held out of a grant from Imperial funds for the reconstruction of crofters' houses' (Brand 1902: 39, lxxxviii; Day 1918: 298).

In 1898, despite reporting some improvements around the island throughout the 1890s, the local Sanitary Inspector found it necessary to note 'in many instances that the new houses referred to are built according to the primitive design and without regard to the sanitary condition of the site chosen' (cited in Brand 1902: lxxxix).[68] In 1900, as a result of the number of new, unimproved houses still being built in Lewis, the District Committee approved a set of building bye-laws, which stated, among other things, that any new houses being built had to be approved by the local authority, that outer walls had to be harled or pointed, internal partitions and ceilings had to be plastered or timber lined, chimneys were to be constructed, roofs were to be wind and water proof, all rooms had to be properly ventilated and lit with windows, proper drainage was to be dug around the house, there was to be no direct communication between the house and the byre, and any storage of manure was to be well drained and situated at a distance from the house (Lewis District Committee

[67] They did point out however, the improvements that had taken place in areas where proprietors had supplied their tenants with lime and timber (Day 1918: 297).
[68] I have been unable to locate the original source for this quote.

1900). It was stated that '[a]ny person offending against any of these bye-laws shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding the sum of five pounds for each offence, and in case of a continuing offence, in a further penalty not exceeding forty shillings for each day after written notice of the offence from the Local Authority' (ibid.). However, as Day (1918: 301-02) informs us, 'the administration at this period was particularly weak', with the chief medical officer in Dingwall, and his assistant in Stornoway 'incapacitated by age from much active service'. It seems as if the Committee had neither the staff, nor the money, nor possibly the will, to go against the tenants' wishes in this matter for, as we shall see in the next chapter, the bye-laws were not effectively enforced.

At the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, the majority of houses in Lewis had not significantly improved. Most still had no partition between the living area and the byre, no chimney, and no windows in the walls. The byre was still cleaned out only once a year, and the thatch was still stripped annually for use as fertilizer. By 1900, the Medical Officer for Barvas could state that

> '[t]hough the dwelling-houses of the people are here so defective and unsatisfactory, and though many improvements might be effected as regards these houses and their surroundings without entailing the slightest hardship on the people, there have been practically no effective proceedings taken by the sanitary authorities to enforce such improvements' (Local Government Board for Scotland 1901: 80).

In 1902, the *Report into the Social Condition of the People of Lewis* noted that Lewis was 'the sole place left where the custom of only one byre-cleaning in the year prevails' (Brand 1902: ciii).

However, changes were taking place in some parts of the island. For example, Anderson Smith comments in *Lewsiana* (1886: 115-16) that, by 1870-72, a greater proportion of the houses in Uig, compared with the rest of the island, 'have rooms completely divided from the cattle by a wooden or stone partition.' This, he takes as a sign that the people in Uig were more prosperous than those elsewhere in the island (ibid.: 116). Both Dilke (1885) and Walpole (1890) found differences, throughout the Highlands and Islands, in the social condition of the people, and in their housing. Dilke (1885: 9) commented that the houses differed 'very considerably in condition,

according probably to the means and tastes of the occupier, the worst being found in some parts of Skye and the Island of Lewis.' Walpole (1890: 6) stated that '[n]o general statement would adequately describe the various conditions under which this population exists' and that '[t]he crofter's house, like the crofter's condition, varies in different localities.' Housing in other Hebridean islands, however, and in the Highlands, had significantly improved over the second half of the nineteenth century (see, for example, MacKinlay 1878: xxxiv; Day 1918: 303). Lewis, and particularly the West Side, seem to have seen the least improvement during this period (Dilke 1885: 107; Brand 1902: ciii).

6.9 Poverty, Prosperity, and Socio-Cultural Change

Although housing was slow to change, periods of poverty and prosperity, coupled with improved communications, ensured that changes were taking place in other areas of life during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, in Lewis as elsewhere.

The latter half of the 1840s was a time of great poverty in Lewis owing to the complete failure of the potato crop in 1846 and in subsequent years. During the second half of the eighteenth century the potato had become the most important crop on the island, and the increase in population that had occurred during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century could not now be supported without it. The fall in the price of cattle contributed to the destitution that was commonplace throughout the Highlands and Islands during this period (Devine 1988: 214).

The famine had a less devastating effect in Lewis than in other islands, and this was at least partly due to the methods of food distribution employed by Matheson (Devine 1988: 221; Hunter 2000: 102). Matheson bought in potato seed and oatmeal which he sold to the islanders at seventy five percent of its market price (Napier 1884: 208). To enable them to pay for the meal, the estate employed them to work on various schemes undertaken by Matheson. John Scobie, Chamberlain at the time, described to the Napier Commission the procedures undertaken by Matheson during the famine:

> The exigency of the unparalleled destitution of the years 1846, '47, and '48, caused by the potato failure of 1845, being unprecedented, made it more difficult to deal with in every Highland management, and led to a simultaneous outlay of land improvements, trenching, fencing, &c., in addition to the said roads and fisheries, so as to make work available to all in various parts of the island. Supplies of food (oatmeal, &c.) were early secured by Sir James, and given out to the people during the whole period of destitution 25 per cent. below the current market price (Napier 1884: 208).

The tenants did not benefit fully from these generous deeds, however, as one third of their wages would be taken for rent and, if they were in arrears, another portion of the wages would also be retained (MacKinlay 1878; Napier 1884; Munro MacKenzie 1994).

The rise in population contributed greatly to the effects of the famine and the measures taken to regain some economic stability in the island. This increase in population was a result of a number of factors. The population grew particularly with the growth of the kelp industry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. At this time there was relative prosperity on the island with most families employed in kelp-making, and the introduction of the potato earlier in the century would certainly have helped provide food for an increasing population (Skene 1890: 374). There was also a tendency for men to marry young and start families, often in order to exempt themselves from military service during the American War of Independence which took place between 1775 and 1783 (Brand 1902: 37). This may also have been the case during the Napoleonic wars of 1803 to 1815. Both the *Old* and *New Statistical Account* inform us that there was a tendency to marry young, and that 'barrenness is scarcely known' (*OSA* 1797: 284; *NSA* 1841: 146). In the Barvas parish, the biggest increase in population occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the years between 1801 and 1841 seeing an increase of 72 per cent (Brand 1902: 2). Similar results can be found for the parishes of Uig, Lochs, and Stornoway (ibid.: 2).

A large part of the overcrowding problem was seen by the proprietor and his Chamberlain to be the result of tenants subdividing their lots and giving part of their land to a family member. As mentioned above, sub-division had taken place after the first lotting, and continued to take place after the second. Although tenants paid

rent to the proprietor for their lot of land, it was illegal for them to allot any part of their land, or any part of their house, to another tenant without the written permission of the proprietor or Chamberlain. The *Articles of Set* attributed to Stewart MacKenzie state that a tenant would be removed, should he 'assign or subset all or any part of his possession' (Article IV). After the second lotting, Matheson also tried to regulate against it under Article 21 of his 1849 *Rules of the Lews Estate*:

> Cha 'n fheud Tuathanach roinn no ath-roinn a dheanamh air taighean no aitribh a tha, no bhios air an togail air a chòir-san, no air stàbuill no bàthaichean, no aon diu sin a bhuineas do'n ghabhaltas atharrachadh gu bhi 'nan taighean-cònaidh, agus chum bacadh a chur air briseadh an fhearainn, le earrannan a dheanamh do'n ghabhail, tha 'n Tuathanach a' cur mar fhiachaibh air fein, nach ceadaich e do neach pòsda sam bith, co-roinn a bhi aige do'n fhearann maille ris fhein, mar d fhuair e cead an Uachdarain no'n t-Seamarlain roi sin ann an sgriobhadh, agus neach sam bith a gheibhear a cur an aghaidh na riaghailt seo, measar e mar fhear fòirnidh, d an dligheach a ghrad chur air falbh a seilbh (Matheson c.1849: 7-8, Article 21).
>
> No Tenant is permitted to divide or subdivide houses or dwellings that have been or will be built on his lot, or stables or byres, nor convert into a dwelling house any such buildings belonging to the lot. In order to prevent the subdivision of land, the Tenant takes it upon himself that he will not permit any married person to share the land with him, without prior written consent from the Proprietor or Chamberlain, and any person found to be contravening this Article will be held as an intruder and will be removed summarily (this author's translation).

However, land was scarce. During the first half of the nineteenth century, F. H. MacKenzie, Stewart MacKenzie and Matheson all cleared tenants from the land in order to create sheep farms, deer parks, and ministers' glebes. When the second lotting took place, between 1848 and 1852, little, if any, thought seems to have been given to the land requirements of an expanding population. Matheson's attempts at land reclamation had been largely unsuccessful, and returning land to the islanders was not financially viable. Tenants had to make do with what they had and large families had to support their children in whatever way they could. There were many cases of married sons building houses on their fathers' lots, or on the common grazing, and of couples converting barns into houses for themselves (Napier 1884).

Although sub-division was illegal in the eyes of the estate, the law against it was never effectively enforced. McNeill (1851: ix) explains why sub-division was not effectively controlled before the second lotting:

> Attempts were made in some cases to put an end to this practice, but it was found to involve so much apparent cruelty and injustice, and it was so revolting to the feelings of all concerned, that children should be expelled from the houses of their parents, that the evil was submitted to, and still continues to exist.

In 1883, Chamberlain William Mackay commented in a statement to the Napier Commission that after the second lotting:

> Everything possible was done to prevent this subdivision of crofts. Many were served with summonses of removal for allowing their sons and daughters to squat on their croft, though these were not enforced. In some cases the son was obliged to pull down the house he had built, and go and live with his father again. Notwithstanding, in the course of a year or two, he would commence to build a second house; but the difficulty was, if we had obliged him to pull down the house again, what were we to do with him, for we could not drive him out of the Lewis. In my opinion, were there free emigration, this subdivision of crofts might be prevented, but not otherwise (Napier 1884: 1094).

By 1851, Matheson and his Chamberlain, John Munro MacKenzie had decided that the only solution to the problem was assisted emigration. In that year, MacKenzie visited every township on the island and selected tenants to emigrate. It was decided that tenants who were two years in arrears of rent and to which another year was being added were to be offered assisted emigration, with Matheson paying for their passage to Canada, and providing clothing where necessary (MacKenzie 1882: 500). Also, 'whole townships which are generally in arrear and are not conveniently situated for fishing and can be converted into grazings' were to be emigrated (Munro MacKenzie 1994: 20, 23rd Jan.). In general, it was 'the most destitute, those most in arrears of rent and who have least stock' (Munro MacKenzie 1994: 34, 16th Feb.) who were to be removed – in other words, those who 'may soon come on the parish' (ibid.: 34, 16th Feb) under the recently established Poor Law (Devine 1988: 215).

The townships of Arnol, North and South Bragar, and South Shawbost escaped mass eviction as they were 'very popelous [sic] and would be difficult to clear, besides there would be no object gained as they are more suitable for small-tenants than anything else' (Munro MacKenzie 1994: 36, 19th Feb.). Despite this, twelve tenants were chosen for emigration from North Bragar, and eleven from South Bragar. Of these, only one family from North Bragar willingly chose to emigrate (ibid.: 36, 19th Feb.).

Although all assisted emigration was described by the Chamberlain as 'voluntary', in fact a number of coercive measures seem to have been taken to ensure the required number of people left the island. At a meeting in Stornoway to oppose emigration, Munro MacKenzie defended the voluntary nature of the emigration in this way:

> I stated that no one c[d] compel the people to emigrate, and that they need not go unless they please, but all whose who were in arrear for rent two years & upwards, would be deprived of their land at Whitsunday next if not paid up by then, giving them the option of emigrating if they can not pay [...] those who do not pay their rents cannot be allowed to remain in possession of lands (Munro MacKenzie 1994: 57, 5th April).

Tenants were also warned that they 'need not expect assistance of any kind either in foor [sic, presumably 'food'] or seed, and that they must wholly depend on their own resources' (Munro MacKenzie 1994: 35, 19th Feb.). Tenants were also prevented from cutting peat, an essential source of fuel, once they had been served their notices of removal (ibid.: 76, 23rd May).

It is unknown how many of the Bragar tenants, marked for emigration, actually did emigrate. In some instances, tenants unwilling to emigrate from a township which was to be cleared, were moved to other townships and given land vacated by those who did emigrate (Napier 1884: 897; Munro MacKenzie 1994: 50, 23th March). It is also possible that some tenants from other townships were moved to Bragar once space became available.

The second lotting therefore occurred at a time when the people were often reliant on the proprietor for work and food, and were also living in fear of eviction. Chamberlain Munro MacKenzie, having spent the day in various townships on the West Side, admitted that some people were 'not willing to confess that they will be short of food before next crop for fear of being sent to America' (Munro MacKenzie 1994: 35, 18th Feb.).

Following a long period of famine between 1846 and 1851, Lewis enjoyed a period of relative prosperity. This was mainly due to the success of the herring industry, in Stornoway, on the east coast of Scotland, and in other fishing centres around Britain.

From the mid-nineteenth century, men began to follow the seasonal herring fishing to ports such as Wick and Great Yarmouth. Stock prices increased also, and when women began to travel regularly to the seasonal herring fishing as packers and gutters in the mid-1870s (Fraser and McNeill 1888: 35), the income of many families increased to produce a 'comfortable maintenance' if not a 'condition of plenty' (ibid.: 4). Thus by the early 1880s, much more money was in circulation amongst the crofter population than had previously been the case (Napier 1884: 971). It is possible that this was particularly the case from the mid-1870s onwards, when following the herring fishing became a common seasonal occupation for Lewis women: earlier in the 1870s, before the women started working as gutters and packers, Anderson Smith (1886: 43) states that 'ready money is a thing almost unknown in many families, as it is never required, except in a year of scarcity.'[69]

Mitchell (1883: 223) informs us that, in 1838, '[t]he clothes of these people are of wool of their own manufacture.' However, even as early as 1836, the minister of Barvas had stated that, in many instances, 'cotton shirts and print gowns are beginning to supersede the use of some of these articles' (*NSA* 1841: 147). By 1883, it seems that significantly less home-made clothing was being worn, with purchased clothing becoming more common: 'I remember that fifty years ago we were clothed with the wool and home-made cloth of our district. Instead of that they have to-day senseless rags that they buy here and there in other places' (Napier 1884: 975). Not all clothing was purchased, however, as Anderson Smith (1886: 43) was able to state in the early 1870s that '[w]ith wool from their own sheep, the women make their own and their men-folk's raiment'.

More food and drink were also being imported by the 1880s (Napier 1884). Although, in 1836, the minister of Barvas could write that '[t]he produce of a foreign soil, as tea, coffee, and sugar, and the common conveniences of art, as knives, forks, &c. are to them altogether alien' (*NSA* 1841: 147), tea and sugar were both in use by

[69] He further comments that money is only wanted for the purchase of tobacco (Anderson Smith 1886: 43).

the 1870s (Anderson Smith 1886: 44).[70] Brand also states that, by 1902, porridge was not eaten as much as it used to be, and that 'the home-made barley bannocks have in large measure been supplanted by loaf bread' (Brand 1902: xcvi).

It should be noted, however, that although the period from 1851 to around 1882 was one of relative prosperity in the context of what had preceded it, it was by no means an affluent time. The island was extremely overcrowded which meant that over-stocking necessarily occurred. As most lots were supporting at least two, if not more, families, and as each family had its own stock, more stock was being grazed than the land could support. This had led to the deterioration of the pasture due to over-eating, and also to the deterioration of the stock, partly due to the poor pasture land, and partly due to the use of poor bulls (Napier 1884: 990). During this period, some families would no doubt have been better off than others, particularly those who had adult children who were involved in the fishing industry.

The winter of 1882-83, saw the beginning of the end of this period of relative prosperity, which had begun in the early 1850s. Bad weather, potato blight, and a poor fishing season caused severe poverty throughout the island (MacDonald 1990: 129). By 1883, twenty of the tenants in Bragar had only one cow each (Napier 1884: 986), and evidence from other townships in Barvas suggests that milk was sometimes scarce (ibid.: 976), particularly in the winter as 'those who have cows allow them to run dry for the sake of the calves' (Fraser and McNeill 1888: 42).

In 1884 poverty increased as fish curers began to sell their fish at auction, and rather than paying their hired-hands a steady wage, awarded them a percentage of the sale price, assuring that fluctuations in the price of fish affected not only the curer, but the hired-hand also:

> Hitherto fluctuations in the market had affected only the curer, but now over-production, foreign competition, and other causes affecting values, came directly home to the fisherman whose earnings were at once reduced from an assured maintenance for the remainder of the year to a mere precarious

[70] The availability of 'ready money' was not absolutely necessary for the purchase of items such as tea and sugar as many local purchases were made by barter, with tenants often exchanging eggs for conveniences (Brand 1902: xcvii).

> subsistence, if he were fortunate enough to obtain an engagement at all' (Fraser and McNeill 1888: 5).

Stock prices fell so that cattle were almost worthless, and in 1888 it was found that the worst cases of destitution in Barvas were to be found in Bragar, Arnol, Brue and Shader (Fraser and McNeill 1888: 30). In the parish of Lochs, children wore very poor clothing, and it was found that '[i]n the majority of cases they possess nothing except the clothes they are actually wearing' (ibid.: 42). By 1888, tea was scarce, due to the lack of money (ibid.: 42), and food was so scarce that school inspector John Wilson noted with dismay that children at a school in Cross were sporadically vomiting water throughout the afternoon. He was told that 'the children had had nothing to eat since they left their beds, and that to allay the pangs of hunger they had been drinking water to excess all the forenoon' (Wilson 1928: 135).

By 1900, however, the fishing industry had picked up for the islanders. The Crofter's Act of 1886 had made provision for loans by the Fishery Board for Scotland for the building of new boats and for the repair or purchase of existing boats (Brand 1902: lix-lx), and a number of piers and harbours were built or repaired after the Western Highlands and Islands Works Act of 1891. This work was carried on by the Congested Districts Board after 1897 (Brand 1902: xlvii).

The last two decades of the nineteenth century also saw improvements in communications on the island. Roads were constructed throughout the island and, between 1880 and 1900, eight additional post offices and twelve new telegraph offices were built (Brand 1902: li-lii). The Congested Districts Board, in their first four years, also expended a significant amount of money on attempts to improve stock and crops on the island, with the importation and distribution of fresh seed and potatoes, and of prime stallions, bulls, and rams, to improve the islanders' stock (Brand 1902: liii).

Despite the ups and downs of poverty and prosperity, by the end of the nineteenth century, the way of life on the island had begun to change. In a statement to the Napier Commission in 1883, Munro MacKenzie, Chamberlain of Lewis from 1848 to 1854, explained that

> [t]he style of living has quite altered in the Highlands during this century, as in other parts of the country. A Highland crofter will on average spend £10 to £30 per annum on the purchase of articles imported into the country, on which his father and grandfather would not have spent £5. Tea, sugar, and wheaten bread were in their time unknown. Clothes and shoes were home-made – thus was little or nothing spent on any luxury, such as tobacco and spirits, the latter being a home production (Napier 1884: 3308).

The minister of Barvas also commented that the people were 'fonder now of buying things not produced at home than they used to be twenty-five years ago' (Napier 1884: 980). The *Report on the Condition of the Cottar Population of the Lews* shows that, by 1888, the population had become more accustomed to luxuries during the period of relative prosperity from the 1850s until the early 1880s, stating that the people 'year by year increased their expenditure on food and clothing, by and bye adding luxuries to the former articles of daily use' (Fraser and McNeill 1888: 6).

The most obvious reason for this increase in spending during this period was that people had more money to spend due to the increase in stock prices, and the success of the herring industry. However this alone does not explain the introduction of purchased items such as clothing and tea.

Dr. MacRae suggested before the Napier Commission that the increase in purchased clothing was due to 'the population having increased so much, and the number of sheep not being increased, the home clothing is not so easily kept up' (Napier 1884: 1088). This does not seem to have been the case, however, at least during the first eight decades of the nineteenth century. Statistics from Brand (1902: 2), stating the increase in population, and from Napier (1884: 1093), stating the increase in stock, suggest that while the population of Barvas increased by approximately 241 per cent over the period, the corresponding increase in sheep in the possession of crofters was 420 per cent. Similar results can be found for other parishes (Napier 1884: 1093; Brand 1902: 2).

More likely, with the women now travelling to the mainland, they were exposed to different people from different places and were able to see first hand how other people lived. Seeing other women whom they may have perceived to have been better off financially, and thus socially, may have encouraged them to emulate their

style, and thus improve their own social standing. By 1872, it was reported by Anderson Smith (1886: 41), that there is '[o]ne article of the toilet we find in general use in the present day, according to competent female authorities, and that is red ink. The close dark house, oppressed with pungent reek, is by no means favourable to good colour in the cheeks of young girls, who thus endeavour, by this simple and cheap cosmetic, to rival the belles who "painted with cinnabar."' Brand (1902: lix) also stressed the importance of the fishing industry in broadening the islanders social horizons, not least in the number of marriages that it generated. Also, women who travelled no further than Stornoway had the opportunity to socialise and to meet English women, who were brought in by curers to help with the kippering in June.

> On Mondays they may be seen wending their way from the country districts to Stornoway. Each carries a creel or basket with food and raiment for the week, and walks barefooted over the rough roads with the utmost unconcern. On reaching the outskirts of Stornoway a halt is made, usually on some grassy plot by the road, a toilet process is gone through, shoes and stockings, which had been carried slung round the neck, are put on, and then the straggling groups proceed to town to commence the arduous duties of another 'long week' (Brand 1902: lix).

There is much evidence, which will be discussed in Chapter 7, to suggest that certain changes in housing were largely the result of emulation by Lewis women. The purchase of 'unnecessary' items such as ornaments was also seen as a sign of wealth, and of 'improvement'. For example, Fraser and McNeill (1888: 5) describe a widow who had two daughters and two sons who were earning good wages from the herring fishing: 'The family were then in comfortable circumstances, of which evidence is not wanting in the shape of superior bedding, household utensils, and some pretension to ornament in their house'. Unfortunately the family was reduced to poverty after the wage-changes of 1884. With the women spending time away from home each year, in the company of people from different socio-cultural backgrounds, it is understandable that they might have been keen to emulate such social markers as purchased clothing and ornaments.

The introduction of tea was probably due as much to the decline in the illicit manufacture of beer and whisky, which it replaced, as to its introduction and adoption through diffusion. Overcrowding may also have led to the introduction of

imported food, with the land not able to support the increased population (Brand 1902: xcvii).

It is clear then, that by the end of the nineteenth century, tenants in Lewis were beginning to desire things that were not necessities, and that they had not previously desired. More money was now in circulation on the island than had been previously, mainly due to the period of relative prosperity between 1851 and the early 1880s, and to the rise in the success of the fishing industry on the island during the 1890s. Islanders, women in particular, were travelling to the mainland and to Stornoway on a regular basis, and communications were being put in place to allow the islanders a greater contact with the rest of the world. As we shall see in the next chapter, this trend continued throughout the twentieth century. However, although certain social changes were adopted during this period, the question remains why changes in housing were not more readily adopted, particularly after 1886 when tenants were awarded security of tenure and compensation for improvements.

6.10 The Tenants

6.10.1 Security of Tenure

Evidence given before the Napier Commission (1884) and the Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes (1885) suggested that the main impediments to improved housing in the Highlands and Islands, were the lack of security of tenure on tenants' holdings, the increase in rent for any improvements undertaken by the tenant, and the lack of fair compensation for improvement if and when tenants had to leave the holding (Napier 1884; Dilke 1885). Without them, it was believed that tenants had no incentive to improve: they could be removed from their holdings at any time, their rent could be increased because of improvements they had made, and if they should leave their holdings, they were not entitled to fair compensation for their improvements. MacKinlay (1878: xxxv) states that

> [w]ithout a lease the crofter has no inducement to improve or drain his land, as his doing so would only tend to a raise in his rent; and being merely a tenant-at-will he is simply dependent on the factor or ground officer for a roof to cover himself and his family.

On the subject of compensation, the Napier Commission found that

> in the case of the improved dwelling, we have not heard of any liberal system of compensation, the occupier in a great measure labours and spends at his own risk, each case will be dealt with apart, and the amount awarded will depend more on the means and the generosity of the landlord than on the equity of the claim (Napier 1844: 49).

It was generally believed that by removing these impediments to improvement, tenants would be encouraged to improve both their houses and their land. Indeed, as early as 1814, Sir John Sinclair stated that '[n]o exertion can be made, no improvement attempted, far less executed, by the tenant who has only a yearly tenure' (Sinclair 1814: 378). That this did not take immediate effect in Lewis after the implementation of the Crofters Act in 1886, is worthy of discussion. The Crofter's Act only went so far in alleviating the conditions of the general population, and it 'utterly failed to address the growing problem of landlessness in the Highlands' (Buchanan 1996: 46). Cottars and squatters were still considered illegal tenants and therefore still had no incentive to improve as they could be removed from their houses at the proprietor's request.[71] Although crofters were granted long-term leases, there were conditions attached to them, one of which was that they must not 'without the landlord's consent, subdivide or sublet his holding or erect additional dwelling-houses' (Day 1918: 191). As little or no increase in land for crofters was forthcoming, in many cases crofters under leases would have had no choice but to subdivide their lots, or to overcrowd their houses with extended family, thereby forfeiting their security of tenure.

The failings of the Crofters Act, however, go only some way to explain the lack of improvement in the island in the late nineteenth century, and depend on the premise that tenants were willing to improve, if only they had the securities of tenure, rent,

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[71] In Barvas parish this was less of a problem than it was elsewhere as most cottars and squatters had been entered into the rent ledger in 1881, leaving only eighty-seven illegal tenants by 1883 (Napier 1884: 957-58). It is unclear whether this was done on purpose or by mistake. William Mackay, who was Chamberlain at the time, comments:

> In opening a new rent ledger, I entered the names of squatters and cottars who had been about ten or fifteen or twenty years as such paying rent, not directly to the landlord, but to the crofter, though perhaps both of them would appear at the rent collection day. That led to trouble and sometimes confusion. I entered the whole of them in the ledger (Napier 1884: 957).

and compensation. There certainly were cases of tenants being removed from their holdings after carrying out improvements, with very little compensation (e.g. MacKinlay 1878: xxxvii-viii). However, despite the findings of the Napier Commission and the Housing of the Working Classes Commission, there is relatively little evidence to suggest that crofters themselves complained about the lack of secure status as a barrier to improvement, although occasional examples can be found (e.g. Napier 1884: 877). The Napier Commission did not focus specifically on housing, however, and there is the possibility that, had they asked more tenants why they did not improve their houses, complaints about secure status would have been more forthcoming. As it was, the main grievances of crofters seem to have been the lack of available land, and increased rents (Napier 1884).

In a statement read to the Napier Commission by a representative of North and South Bragar, it was requested that '[t]he houses should be much improved, so that the cattle and family should be under different roofs, and not in the same apartment as they are at present' (Napier 1884: 986). This suggests that the tenants themselves desired improved housing, if only they had the means to implement it. However, the request for improved housing may signify that some tenants appreciated that to be perceived to desire such changes, and all that they signified, was socially advantageous, even though they may not have particularly welcomed them in their own houses. Certain changes, for example the introduction of a partition wall, could easily have been done by the tenant without much work, and would not have needed assistance from the proprietor. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that some of the crofter witnesses before the Napier Commission in Lewis may have been coached, to some extent, in their preparation of evidence, in order that it might have the greatest impact on the Commissioners (Cameron 1996: 21). That the tenants may have said one thing, while believing another, is somewhat backed up a report by the Scotsman Commissioner in 1878, in which he distinguished between two types of tenant:

> In districts where the natives have been brought into contact with outsiders who uphold the system, they have learned this parrot-cry about leases; and as soon as they are taxed with lack of energy, they take refuge behind it. In several hamlets, however, it is noticeable that such an idea has never occurred to the

> men; what they there say is that what was good enough for their fathers is good enough for them (MacKinlay 1878: 20).

This suggests that while there were no doubt some tenants who were willing to improve their houses, given the way and the means to do so, the majority of tenants in Lewis may in fact have had little desire, at this time, to improve their housing, and certainly not to the standards that the estate desired.

It has also been suggested that tenants actively did not want leases. Sir Kenneth MacKenzie, in evidence given to the Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, stated that he had offered nineteen-year leases to tenants on his estates on the east coast and on the west coast of Scotland. Although the east coast residents welcomed the leases, very few tenants on the west coast took them up: 'They fear that at the conclusion of a 19 year lease they would be liable to be removed or to have their rent raised. They are more satisfied with the customary tenure than with the 19 year lease' (Dilke 1885: 111). It is even suggested in the Brand Report (1902: lxxxvii) that tenants in fact were averse to possessing leases as it went against their traditional system of landholding:

> There was a deep-rooted conviction throughout the West that the native population had a natural right to the land of their birth, which right descended from father to son; and that the signing of a lease for a term of years formed a contract under which they were either obliged to quit or to enter into a new arrangement, on the expiry of the lease, and was thus equivalent to selling their birthright.

However, leases were most likely not taken up by tenants because, in order to be awarded the lease, all the recommended housing improvements had first to be completed. During the second lotting, for example,

> a written lease was to be granted to each tenant on his fulfilling the terms required by the estate regulations, viz., to pay up all arrears of rent, to build a suitable house, with division between himself and cattle, &c. These leases were not much asked for by the tenants, as they were slow in doing their part (Napier 1884: 3304).

Anderson Smith (1886: 53) sums up the attitude of the crofters to the conditions of those leases offered during the first lotting:

> We are told that at one time the cotters were offered leases with *only* fifty-four rules attached, the transgression of one cancelling the right of the lessee. One old man, at Ness, laughed heartily at the document sagely remarking that he

> could not keep ten commandments for a mansion in the sky, much less fifty-four for a black house in the Lews.

It was also suggested that it was not the issue of security that would lead to improvement, but a matter of how much tenants trusted their proprietor (Dilke 1885: 112). Around 1878, several crofters in Barvas stated,

> [w]hat is the use of building houses, or of improving the farms, when they may be taken from us again at the end of twenty years. All this village was re-lotted thirteen years ago. A man went and drew a ticket with his lot and his rent on it, and he had to take it and build a new house. That was under the old factor; and we had all to shift our houses back from the road – they were too near the front, and so we had to rebuild them. Well, you see we don't know but we may be shifted again, and so we do not improve (MacKinlay 1878: 19).

It is possible that even when tenants were awarded security of tenure, they still believed they were at risk of being evicted, particularly if they got on the wrong side of the local constable or ground officer, or even the Chamberlain, some of whom were known to abuse their position (see, for example, MacKinlay 1878: xxxvii). Anderson Smith (1886: 53) was of a similar opinion, stating, in 1878, that '[w]e much fear, however, that a lease in any case would be practically valueless.' While the fear of having to move again no doubt had a negative effect on the tenants' attitude to improvement, and while the Act of 1886 probably did little to dispel this fear, despite their newfound security of tenure, I do not believe that this alone would have stopped tenants making some of the changes required by the estate, if they had themselves desired it.

There was also some evidence, prior to the Crofters Act (1886), to suggest that security of tenure did not necessarily lead to improvement. The then Chamberlain, William Mackay, explained to the Napier Commission that tenants who had moved from Bosta to Kirkibost had been given leases when they moved, but '[s]till their houses are nothing better than other houses in the island, nor are they in better circumstances than those who have no written lease' (Napier 1884: 158). Mackay believed that 'were improving tenants secured compensation for permanent improvements upon the crofts there would be no need for leases' (MacKinlay 1878: xxxvi). The *Report on the Housing of the Working Classes* (1885) also found that '[t]he question of compensating the tenant for his share in the erection of the dwelling

is, in the view of the crofters, one of the chief impediments to their undertaking any improvements in their houses' (Dilke 1885: 10). As mentioned above, however, the Commission's inquiry took place in Edinburgh, and crofters themselves were not interviewed.

It should also be noted that security of tenure and compensation were not always necessary for improvement to take place. Some houses, such as those in Uig, had introduced partitions by the early 1870s (Anderson Smith 1886: 115-16), and the Napier Commission provides evidence that partitions had been introduced into some houses in Ness by 1883 (Napier 1884: 998). It will be shown in the next chapter that, by 1905, there is evidence for improved houses being built by squatters (who had no leases) in areas where crofter housing remained unimproved (Dittmar and Millar 1905).

That many tenants had no desire to improve, at least down to the 1870s, is borne out, in part, by the instances mentioned above, of tenants being 'encouraged' to improve their houses, only to revert back to their former style of house a short time later. The various efforts by local authorities in the 1880s and 1890s are proof that security of tenure, rent, and compensation were not all that was necessary to persuade tenants to improve their houses. Although the introduction of more secure holdings may have encouraged some tenants to improve, in general it seems that tenants throughout the island had no desire to improve their houses in the manner suggested by the authorities.

6.10.2 Resistance to Housing Change

It is quite understandable that tenants, even in the late nineteenth century, would have been reluctant to implement the changes suggested by the 1849 and 1879 *Rules and Regulations* and by the District Committee's bye-laws. Returning to the motivations for material change discussed in Chapter 3, it will be remembered that changes are generally made out of necessity or advantage. If the tenants did not deem particular changes to be either necessary or advantageous, they would have had little incentive to change. None of the required changes were perceived by the

tenants as being of necessity, and many of the changes would in fact have been socially, culturally, and environmentally disadvantageous.

For example, the house was still very much connected to the agricultural cycle. The soot-filled thatch was stripped annually and used as fertilizer on the potatoes, and the manure was removed from the byre once a year to use as fertilizer. The introduction of a chimney (which would remove the smoke from the house), and being prohibited from removing the thatch annually and from storing the manure in the byre, would have been extremely disadvantageous to the tenants. They were aware that storing the manure on a dung-heap outside, as regulations suggested, would allow the rain to wash away many of the nutrients that would help to fertilize the crops. They may have had less objection to housing the manure in another roofed building, separate from the house, however they saw no need to do this, particularly as it would have meant more work for them, and, given the climate, it was advantageous to keep the manure within the house. In addition, tenants may not have had room on their lot to build a separate byre, and as there were no 'sanitary conveniences' in the houses at that time, it was therefore useful to have the byre within easy reach.

Culturally, the introduction of a chimney to remove the smoke was also undesirable, as was the introduction of a partition between the living-end and the byre-end of the house. As discussed in Chapter 4, the people believed that much of the heat from the fire came from the smoke, and that the animals in the house should have as much access to it as the humans. It was believed that the cattle should not only benefit from the heat of the fire, but should also be able to see it, and it was said that the hens laid better with the heat of the hearth (Anderson Smith 1886: 38-39; Walker 1989a: 58).

Partitioning the house, and removing the central hearth to an end wall or to a partition wall would also have disrupted the use of space within the house. The central hearth was an important cultural element, and it is interesting to note that both Lord Napier and Sheriff Nicolson, when questioned before the Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, stated that they could see the benefits of a central

hearth, and that a gable hearth and chimney were not, in their eyes, absolute requirements of a decent home, as long as there was a hole above the fire to allow the smoke to escape (Dilke 1885: 105-06, 110). Environmentally, an upright window, and the introduction of an extra door would only serve to weaken that face of the house to the weather. Again, Napier stated that '[i]n that climate it is possible that a second door in a dwelling might not be necessary, and sometimes it might even be prejudicial' (ibid.: 105-06).[72]

6.10.3 Housing Change versus Settlement Change

External force as a type of necessity was discussed in Chapter 3 as a motivation for change. Despite efforts by various authorities, landowners and the District Committee, throughout the nineteenth century, housing change was generally resisted by tenants. When we compare the enforced movement of settlements during the first and second lotting with the enforced improvements in housing, there are clearly differences between the two in the way in which they were instigated by the authorities, and in the way they were accepted or rejected by the tenants.

The first and second lottings were primarily carried out to benefit the proprietors, not the tenants, and it is likely that the authorities in each instance were therefore prepared to enforce the settlement shifts if necessary. Any tenants opposing such a move, particularly perhaps with the first lotting, may well have been threatened with eviction. The tenants had little option but to comply with the settlement shifts, as to resist may have led to their houses being dismantled and the possibility of them being left without land. The possession of land, however tenuous, was extremely important to the tenants as agriculture was the basis of their livelihood, providing them and their families with food and drink. In other words, they had too much at stake not to comply with the estate's requests.

Housing change, however, was primarily being implemented to benefit the tenants. The proprietors may have found implementing such changes socially advantageous

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[72] It was his belief that only 'dwellings in which there is no separation between the cattle and the human inhabitants, and no upright window' should be deemed uninhabitable (Dilke 1885: 105-06).

for themselves, but at the heart of the matter was the movement to improve the condition of the tenants. The measures used to introduce housing change were therefore likely to be less draconian, particularly during, and after, the late 1880s, when crofter conditions in the Highlands and Islands were very much in the public eye. The proprietors, and the subsequent responsible authorities, knew that evicting tenants was not an option as it would have left tenants in an even worse predicament than they had been in previously. Such drastic measures may also have been seen as socially and politically disadvantageous on the part of the proprietor, or other authorities, particularly after the land agitations of the 1880s. In 1883, the then Chamberlain reported to the Napier Commission that 'when an attempt is made to enforce the rules of the estate a "hue and cry" is immediately raised about the cruelty and oppression of evictions' (Napier 1884: 1096). That the estate, and later the District Committee, struggled with the level of force to use in order to implement the desired changes is shown by their inability to control sub-division and to implement such changes that had the backing of the law behind them effectively.

From the tenants' point of view, however, the threat of eviction was probably still very real, possibly even after the Crofters Act, and yet they resisted change. The question which then arises is why they thought they could resist. It is possible that tenants sensed from the authorities that eviction was less likely to occur from failure to implement the required improvements (which were more for their benefit than the proprietors) than from, for example, non-payment of rent. It also may have been significant that, in many cases, whole townships resisted improvement. The people, therefore, may have felt that there was strength in numbers, and that proprietors were less likely to evict whole townships for failing to implement change, thus losing both rent and, possibly, face. This would go some way to explaining evidence provided by former Chamberlain, Monro MacKenzie, which suggests that, in some townships at least, any one person who implemented change was very much looked down upon by his neighbours. Munro MacKenzie explained how he had persuaded one tenant to build a new house for which he provided the plans. Both the Chamberlain, and Matheson, were delighted with the result, however, three months later, the

Chamberlain found the front door and the windows blocked up, and no smoke coming from the chimneys but 'issuing through the thatch' (Napier 1884: 3305):

> I asked the occupant what was the meaning of all these changes. He replied that he was in fear about his cattle at night, that they might get loose and hurt one another, that they were cold without seeing the fire, and that he had made a communication between the byre and the room where they lived. I asked him why he had the fire in the middle of the house, and did not use the chimneys. He said he wanted to make soot straw for his potatoes, &c. I told him I did not believe in all these excuses, that there must be something else which he must explain. At last he acknowledged it was the ill-will and ill talk of his neighbours; he could not stand it – even his own father was among the worst of these people. Fearing they would have to build such houses as he did, they got him prevailed upon to go back and live in his byre (Napier 1884: 3305).

In this instance, a number of different changes were embodied in the new house. Neighbours may therefore have felt more resistance to this than they may have felt had he introduced just one change, such as a partition wall, to an existing house. Munro MacKenzie also described another instance whereby a man was seen to be working industriously in his lot, and was given a boll of meal[73] by the proprietor for setting a good example in the neighbourhood. Three months later, the man had not done a stroke of work as his neighbours had 'taunted him for working for the proprietor' (Napier 1884: 3305).

As described in Chapter 3, change is always introduced by an individual, who will have assessed the advantages and the disadvantages, and the possible risks involved in making a particular change. In close-knit communities where there is a great deal of homogeneity in housing, and a shared culture, there can be a great deal of risk, particularly when making changes that challenge the cultural needs and beliefs of the community. Pocius (1991), in a study of the fishing village of Calvert in Newfoundland, found that, even in the late twentieth century, certain housing norms were generally adhered to, with regard to style, layout and decoration. Houses which contradicted these norms were 'generally viewed quite negatively by residents' (ibid.: 220). It is not surprising therefore, that when changes were implemented by one individual but not by anyone else in the community, that individual may have felt strong pressure to subsequently reject the change.

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[73] A boll of meal was equivalent to 140lb. at 16 ounces to the pound (*DSL*).

As mentioned above, it was not uncommon for houses that had been 'improved', to be 'unimproved' a short time later. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Firstly, it is possible that improvements were carried out in order that tenants might receive the leases offered for improved houses. Secondly, it may have been that they were genuinely willing to try out the new improvements before realising that they were unsatisfactory and rejecting them. Thirdly, and, I suggest, more likely, there may have been a certain amount of 'persuasion' by the authorities. In Barvas, for example, where tenants were 'made to build' (Napier 1884: 163) improved houses, it is very likely that the tenants involved made the changes in order to placate the authorities, before 'returning to their old habit' (Napier 1884: 163). Anderson Smith (1886: 121) certainly suggests that, in the early 1870s, it was normal for tenants to 'calmly endure any severity of government so long as they may be left in peaceable possession of their lots.' He also implies that tenants were very wary of the authorities and did not trust that they had the tenants' best interests at heart:

> Every real or imaginary improvement is looked upon as a 'dodge' of the factor to add to the crofters' rents; and as many of their real or imaginary rights have been ruthlessly invaded, they naturally view every new movement with suspicion (Anderson Smith 1886: 121).

However, another theory for the tenants' apparent resistance to housing change, but acceptance of settlement change, has been put forward by Dalglish (2000), in relation to settlement and housing change in Kintyre and Kilfinan, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dalglish agrees with the many architects, archaeologists, sociologists, and anthropologists (for example Rapoport 1969a, 1982; Bourdieu 1973, 1977; Hodder 1982; Waterson 1993) who see the house, and the settlement, as an active, rather than a passive, participant in the social and cultural lives of a people. Rapoport (1969a: 48-49), for example, writes that 'the house and settlement may serve as physical devices to perpetuate and facilitate the *genre de vie*. In this interpretation the house is not purely a physical thing'. According to Dalglish (2000: 85), therefore, '[i]n this sense, the material world is active in structuring people's social practice'.

Discussing Improvement as a means to civilizing, and gaining control over the people, Dalglish suggests that 'Improvement was fundamentally different from earlier civilising projects in aiming to undermine the routine practices that constituted clanship and to make the associated concepts of collective heritage unknowable' (Dalglish 2000: 265).

> The settlement and landscape changes associated with Improvement were intended to foster social change that would undermine the structuring of social relations under clanship and remove the basis for rebellion against that interest (Dalglish 2000: 337).

Material change 'undermined the pre-Improvement structuring of family and community' (Dalglish 2000: 229), and by the acceptance or rejection of various Improvement practices, tenants were accepting or rejecting various aspects of Improvement itself: 'Improvement and capitalism were accepted, rejected, or more ambiguously received through the cessation or continuation of different aspects of pre-Improvement practice' (ibid.: 232).

The acceptance of external change (change in settlement structure) in Lewis was probably primarily due to a desire for continued occupancy. As Dalglish (2000: 335) acknowledges, although the Improved settlement layout would have 'facilitated the deconstruction of community ties', it would not necessarily have destroyed the sense of community completely, as discussed in Chapter 5. While the settlement shifts resulted in a change in the material set-up of the community, and in the breaking up of the shared occupancy of the arable land, the pasture land was still held in common, and the tasks which had previously been done in common, continued to be carried out in this way. I suggest that the people were aware of this, and were therefore willing to accept settlement change, in order to assure their continued occupancy. In this case the advantages of change outweighed the disadvantages and, in any case, continuity was not an option.

With regard to housing change, those tenants that accepted both external and internal change, 'were accepting a change to the nature of their holding and the structuring of their everyday life' (Dalglish 2000: 337). Those that accepted external change but

rejected internal change, accepted the change in their system of land-holding, thus ensuring continued occupancy, but rejected change at a familial level:

> Unpartitioned space as the locus of a wide variety of daily activities, with its focus on the central hearth, would have encouraged the individual to conceive of themselves as an integral part of the familial unit. Their experience in almost every facet of life was experienced as part of that unit; it was shared experience (Dalglish 2000: 338).

Thus, those tenants that rejected internal (i.e. housing) change, were rejecting change 'in the traditional locus of the structuring of the relationships that justify heritable occupancy' (Dalglish 2000: 338).

It may be that in the post-Improvement settlements of the first and the second lottings, the house and its internal arrangement gained more significance as a representation of the community than it had in the pre-Improvement (i.e. pre-lotting) settlement, where it was expressed more externally. Any attempts to change the internal layout of the house, particularly by an authority who was not well respected by the tenantry, or who did not understand the socio-cultural significance of the house, may have been seen as yet another attack on their beliefs and values.

However, having established that settlement change was, to a large extent, an enforced change which tenants accepted due to concerns over continued occupancy, the question still remains: what were the underlying issues that allowed, and persuaded the tenants to choose continuity, rather than change, in their houses? As discussed above, the proposed changes were neither necessary nor advantageous in the eyes of the crofters. I suggest that housing change was slow to be accepted by the tenants because it was seen as, and in effect was, a direct attack on both their culture and their agricultural practices. Agriculturally, after the first and second lotting, tenants found themselves having to cultivate, from scratch, areas of land that were, in many cases, not as fertile as those they had been forced to leave. Although F. H. MacKenzie, Stewart MacKenzie, and Matheson, tried to persuade the tenants to use improved methods of cultivation, these were rejected out of hand, with tenants preferring to retain their own 'ancient and uncouth modes' (Hogg 1888: 107). Changes within the house that would have had an effect on cultivation were also rejected.

Rejection of housing change involved a conscious acceptance of continuity over change – tenants were not implementing change against the wishes of the proprietor, they simply chose continuity, ignoring his requests for change as far as was possible. Whereas resisting settlement shift would have resulted in conflict, the quiet resistance of housing change resulted in frustrated authorities who, on the whole, did not understand the seemingly backward attitude of the people.

That the authorities wished to alter the culture of the tenants is witnessed by their attempts to change the attitudes of the people to such issues as sanitation and gender. However, both the landowners' and the local authorities' ideas about Improvement were coming from their own socio-cultural background – their own beliefs and values – their own *genres de vie*. On top of that, the housing improvements they were attempting to implement were based on improvements that had been successfully adopted elsewhere, particularly in southern and eastern Scotland, amongst communities with different socio-cultural backgrounds – in other words, different *genres de vie*. Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Adam Collier (1953: 4) wrote that

> [w]hile it is always necessary to remember the peculiarities of the physical environment in the highlands, the essential differences are those of social structure, and still more, of outlook; the 'problem' of the Highlands really arises out of a clash of social philosophies. It lies in the persistence into new circumstances of an ancient mode of life and thought, adapted to its own environment and with its characteristic form of social organization. The problems and difficulties of the last century and of today have arisen mainly from the impact upon this society of a different way of life and thought, the product of the Industrial Revolution. It is a problem for the Highlands because of the disparity in power and pervasiveness of the two cultures.

It was recognised by the authorities during the nineteenth century that education, increased communication, and exposure to good examples, would increase the speed of socio-cultural change on the island. However, rather than watch the seeds of such change growing and developing spontaneously into material changes, the authorities focused also on the 'precipitate and imperative legislation' rejected by the Napier Commission (Napier 1884: 49), implementing changes directly, through estate regulations and public speeches, with very little attention to 'the means, the habits,

and the desires of the tenant' (ibid.: 50). Thus, the authorities ran the risk of alienating the tenantry and fostering in them resentment towards authoritarian beliefs and regulations.

In order to motivate material change, there has to be a perceived social, cultural, or environmental necessity or advantage to implementing it. Although that motivation was present in the society and culture of the authorities, it was completely absent in the society and culture of the people. I suggest that this fact is at the heart of the struggle between the authorities and the tenants on the issue of improved housing. Until the society and culture of the people had altered so that material change became, first of all, possible, and then either necessary or advantageous, the tenants would not willingly instigate change.

The required changes, therefore, could not have been satisfactorily adopted in Lewis until the society had changed such that the cattle were no longer of primary importance, the thatch was no longer needed for fertilizer, and perhaps most importantly of all, the culture of the people had adapted to this new society:

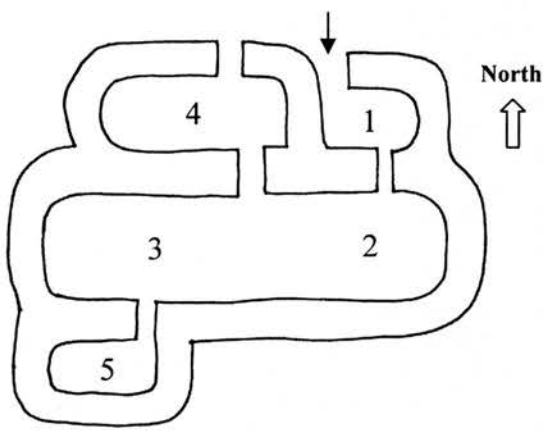
> [A]t every point the house is adapted to its fundamental purposes. When those purposes are otherwise served, these points of structure will cease to have any survival value. They will continue, no doubt, by the inertia of custom, but they will gradually disappear. The problem, therefore, is not how to clean the house, but how to secure that the agricultural purposes the house serves are served by methods more consistent with a healthy, vigorous, and clean life (MacKenzie 1917: 429).

Such changes were in process as early as the mid-nineteenth century, but changes such as this take time to filter through whole communities. In 1849, the Highland Relief Board reported that '[t]he minds of the people seem to be in a transition state, and a national change of habits, usually the growth of some generations, promises fair to be speedily produced' (HRB 1849: 17). Mitchell (1883: 271) also recognised, in the early 1880s, that although improvement had begun in some areas, there was 'not much evidence of great general improvement in the habits of the people, nor their progress in civilized modes of life', as 'the habits and mode of life of a whole people cannot be suddenly changed.'

6.11 Housing Change During the Matheson Period

6.11.1 The Phase 3 Houses

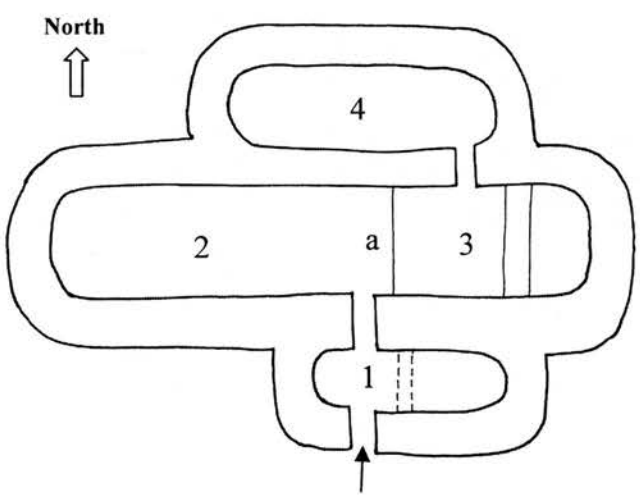
The Phase 3 houses are those houses that were built during the second lotting (1848-1852). Comparing the plans of the Phase 3 houses with those of Phases 1 and 2, it can be seen that a number of the Phase 3 houses, notably 12, 16(a), 19(a), 26(b), and 27(b), are somewhat larger than those of Phases 1 and 2: the byre-dwelling unit is larger, as is the barn (where there is one) and the *fosglan* (compare Plan 7 and Plan 8). The *fosglan* in a number of houses, such as 16(a), 19(a), and 35, is not only larger but seems to have been used, and sometimes constructed, in two distinct parts with the entrance to the byre-dwelling unit between them (Plan 9).



Phase 2

1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn
5. *taigh-fhuaraich*

Plan 7: *Taigh Iain Gobha*, South Bragar (1:250)

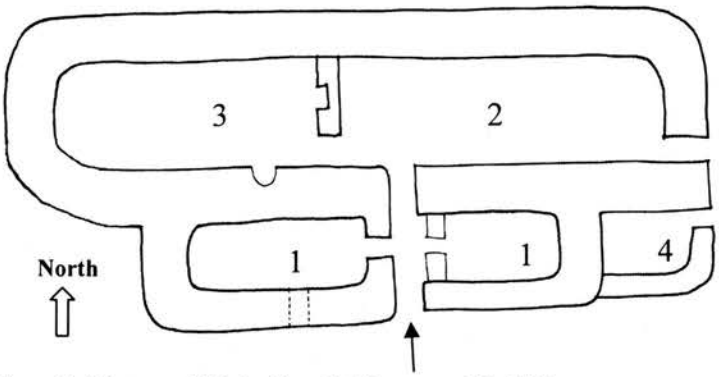


Phase 3

1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

a. step up to living area

Plan 8: House 27(b), South Bragar (1:250)



Phase 3

1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. hen-house

Plan 9: House 19(a), South Bragar (1:250)

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the *fosglan* described by Thomas had space for a hand-quern, and sometimes a horse:

> The outer door opens upon the *fosgalan* or porch, which is a small oblong, 12 feet by 6 feet, and in which there is often a quern (*bra*) upon a fixed board. The horse is accommodated here in severe weather; and as he almost fills the place, it is sometimes difficult to get past him, as I have experienced (Thomas 1867: 155).

Mitchell makes reference to the *fosglan* being in two parts. After explaining that the quern can be found 'on one hand', he continues that '[o]pposite this is the stall for lambs and calves' (Mitchell 1880: 50-51).

The *taigh-fhuaraich* ('cold room' or 'upper room') seems to disappear in the Phase 3 houses, possibly as a result of the increase in the size of the living area.

The reason for the increase in the size of the houses between the first and second lottings is unclear. It might be suggested that it was simply a result of the increase in population during the first half of the nineteenth century, with an increase in the size of the average family, and the lack of land such that extended families often had to share the same house. The population statistics show, however, that the population did not increase between 1841 and 1851, although there was a significant increase between 1851 and 1861 (Table 3 below). It is therefore possible that the increase in house sizes reflected an earlier increase in population. It is also possible that the introduction of box-beds would have necessitated larger houses, however it is uncertain whether box-beds were introduced at the time the new houses were built or sometime shortly afterwards, once the fishing industry had picked up. It is also

unclear whether the decision to build bigger houses during the second lotting came from the tenants or from the proprietor.

Table 2: Population statistics, South Bragar Census Data, 1841-1901

Year	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Total houses	67	65	68	79	76	72	78
Total Persons	298	298	348	421	392	386	405
Mean Persons per House	4.45	4.58	5.12	5.33	5.16	5.36	5.19

At least three houses, 16(b), 19(a), and 35, were built without an attached barn. House 19(a) had a separate barn nearby (Inf. E). As house 35 had a fairly small byre-dwelling unit but a large double *fosglan*, it is possible that the larger of the two *fosglan* units was used as a barn. House 16(a) had an attached barn, which has since been demolished (Inf. E; Inf. N) and it is possible that house 16(b) was built for an old relation who did not farm the land and would have had no need for a barn. It is unclear whether house 26(b) had an attached or a separate barn.

It is also noticeable that in some of the Phase 3 houses the doorway into the byre-dwelling unit is closer to the living end of the house than in the Phase 1 and 2 houses (compare Plan 7 and Plan 8). This was not the case in houses 35 and 49, but seems to have been the case in houses 12, 16, 19(a), 26(b), and 27(b).

It is important to note that the house plans visible today may not reflect the plans of the houses as they were first built. Doorways may have been created, blocked up, or moved during the intervening years, rooms may have been shortened or lengthened, and additional units may have been added or removed. For example, houses 19(a) and 35 both have a partition wall containing a fire-place between the byre and the living area. These would not have been built until the early twentieth century and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Often such changes can be discerned from the existing remains, particularly where a door has been blocked up or where a room

has been shortened. This is not always the case, however, and caution should be exercised when attempting to drawing conclusions from the physical evidence alone.

One other interesting feature of the houses at this time, mentioned by Mitchell, was the practice of pulling down part of the end wall of the byre once a year, to aid in the removal of the manure: 'In those districts where horses are used, when spring comes, the end of the house is often partially pulled down, so that the horse and his panniers may enter to be loaded on the spot' (Mitchell 1880: 51). In Gaelic, this feature was known as the *toll-each* (horse-hole) or *toll-innireach* (manure-hole), and the physical evidence shows that practice of building a temporary piece of wall in the end-wall of the byre lasted down to the twentieth century in many houses. While there is no surviving physical evidence for the existence of this practice in any of the Phase 3 or 4 houses in Bragar, Mitchell's comment suggests that this practice was common, at least in some areas, at this time. A number of good examples can still be seen in the township of Arnol, in houses which probably date from the second half of the nineteenth century, and one of the Phase 5 houses in South Bragar, house 15(b), has a very distinct *toll-each* in the end wall of the byre (Figure 24). This photograph was taken from inside the byre, looking towards the end wall. The *toll-each*, i.e. the portion of wall which was dismantled every year, can be seen in the centre of the picture, and under it, the *toll-lodain*, or drain. A doorway has been created to the left of the *toll-each*. A number of the Phase 3 houses, for example houses 12 and 19(a), have a doorway in the end-wall of the byre. These would have been later developments as, at the time of the second-lotting, the houses had only one doorway, for both the people and the cattle.

Figure 24: *Toll-each* and *toll-lodain* in house 15(b), South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2000)

The written sources available for the mid-to-late nineteenth century provide us with a fuller description of the furniture of the Phase 3 houses than exists for those of Phases 1 and 2. Of particular interest are references to box-beds, dressers, and chests.

Both MacLeòid (1960: 336) and MacDonald (1990: 61-62) suggest that box-beds (*leapannan-dùinte*, 'closed-beds') came into use in the mid-nineteenth century although neither explains why. I have found no reference to box-beds prior to the 1860s, although, as discussed in Chapter 4, Mitchell (1883: 232) mentions 'some common boards put together for two or three beds' in 1838, and Worsaae mentions the use of 'wooden plank beds' in 1846 (Stummann Hansen 2000: 89). Both Mitchell (1880) and Thomas (1867) mention the use of box-beds in the mid-1860s, with Mitchell (1880: 52) giving a particularly detailed description:

> At the farther end of the apartment, if it may be so called, which we are presently describing, stand the beds. These are not the true box or shut-in bed. Such a form would involve too much wood and too finished workmanship. They usually consist simply of four rough, upright posts bound together by

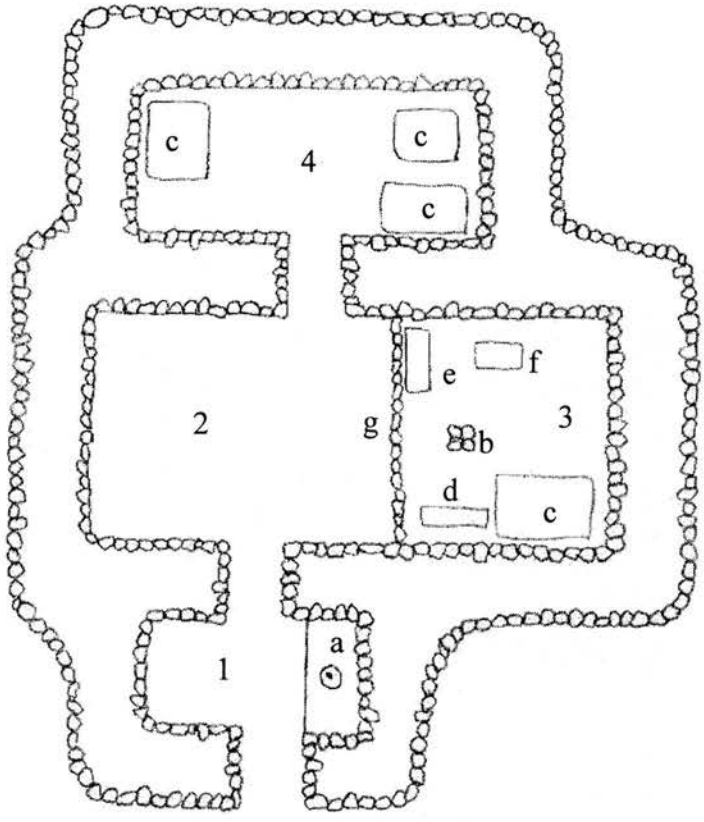
> narrow side stretchers, on which rests a wooden bottom covered with loose straw. The two uprights which are farthest form the wall often reach the rafters, and are attached to them by straw ropes. Upon these is a sort of inner roof constructed, and this inner roof is often covered with divots. The need for this roof-within-a-roof depends on the fact that the outer roof is often far from water-tight. All sexes and ages occupy these beds. Indeed, they are often the only beds possessed. If the family be large, however, there may be one or more similar beds constructed in the barn [...].

By this time, Thomas (1867: 156) informs us, 'the evidently modern luxury of bedsteads and a dresser are quite usual.' Thomas assumes that such luxuries were of fairly recent introduction due to the scarcity of suitable pieces of timber on the island. This may well have been the case. It has been noted that men frequently brought back timber from Wick at the end of the fishing season (Inf. H; Hirst 2005: 25) and it could be that the prosperous period which began in the early 1850s gave tenants the means to buy timber, and that travelling to Stornoway and the east coast of Scotland to follow the seasonal herring fishing gave them the opportunities. In addition, tenants would have been exposed to the types of box-beds (and indeed dressers) common in these areas, and may well have decided to try their own hand at such constructions. In this context it may be noted that beds built into the thickness of the wall (*crùban*) were still in existence by the mid-1860s, but were only of 'occasional occurrence' (Mitchell 1880: 57).

Mitchell (1880: 52) implies that dressers were not all that common, nor particularly well-made:

> On the woman's side, with its back to the cattle, there is occasionally a rude *dresser* with shelving, to hold such plates and basins as belong to the household; and beside it two or three pots generally find their place when out of use.

Thomas (1867: 156) also indicates the position of the dresser, stating that '[b]ehind the dresser is the calves' location, because it is near the fire; and the cows are tethered in winter along the wall.' Figure 25 shows the positioning of furniture as found by Thomas in a house on the West Side of Lewis.



1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. dwelling
4. barn

a. quern (*brà*)
b. hearth (*teine*)
c. bed (*leabaidh-dùinte*)
d. bench (*being* or *sèis*)
e. dresser (*dreasair*)
f. chest (*ciste*)
g. partition (row of stones) (*stall* or *tallan*)

Figure 25: House on the West Side of Lewis showing the position of furniture (after Thomas 1867: 154-55)[74]

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[74] The *tallan* was the stone partition wall, separating the byre from the living area, which was introduced into Lewis houses during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and which usually housed a chimney. This will be discussed further in Section 7.2.2.2. The word '*tallan*' also appears in Gaelic as '*hallan*' (Walker 1989a: 48) and '*fallan*' (MacKenzie 1905: 401), along with other variations of '*tallan*' such as '*talainte*' (Slade 1994: 46). Dwelly (1993) defines '*talan*' as a '[p]artition in black houses about 3ft. high, for separating the portion occupied by the cattle' (Dwelly 1993). The word '*hallan*' is also used in Scots, to mean either '[a]n inner wall, partition or screen erected in a cottage between the door and the fireplace to act as a shield from the draught of the door, gen. composed of mud or clay mixed with stones or moulded over a wood and straw framework', or, a 'partition of stone or clay in a byre or stable or between the living room and the byre' (*DSL*). A timber partition wall is known in Lewis as a '*bòrd-isean*' (CEATS SC; Inf. B), presumably a Gaelicisation of the word 'partition'. The term '*cailbh*' is also used in Lewis for a timber partition (Inf. A). The Gaelic word '*stall*' is defined by Dwelly (1993) as being the '[e]dge of the floor next the byre in old thatched houses' and he notes that he acquired this definition from a Lewis informant. MacLennan (1925), from Uig in Lewis, defines '*stall*' as 'the step in the floor down to the level of the byre in the very old thatched houses'. According to Dr. Finlay MacLeod (pers. comm.), although the term '*stall*' itself was not in use in his house, the door in the partition wall between the byre and the living area was known as '*dorus a' staill*' ('the *stall* door'). He describes the '*stall*' as being the area behind the '*tallan*'. Today, this area is more commonly known in Lewis as '*cùl an tallain*' ('behind the *tallan*').

The position of the dresser, and the movement of the door from the lower end of the byre towards the living area may represent the beginning of a change in values whereby the tenants were beginning to introduce segregation between themselves and their cattle.

There would also have been a number of chests in the house, kept either in the living area or in the barn, holding 'the Sunday clothes and other such valuables' (Mitchell 1880: 52). Thomas (1867: 156, 157) notes, however, that while the men were away from home during the herring fishing season, perhaps only one chest would be left at home. Thomas (1867: 154-55) and MacKinlay (1878: 18) also mention the presence of a spinning wheel in the living area and it is likely that a number of houses had spinning wheels by this time. Spinning wheels had been introduced by F. H. MacKenzie's wife, who established the first spinning school on the island in 1763. Although island women were at first reluctant to attend, being afraid of being transported to the American plantations, they soon overcame their fears and quickly picked up the new skill (MacDonald 1990: 144). Spinning wheels were either provided free to pupils, or at a low cost (ibid.: 144). Before the introduction of spinning wheels, yarn was spun with a distaff and spindle (ibid.: 63).

In the mid-1860s, there were no tables in the houses, and chairs were unusual, as Nicolson (1866: 12) noted:

> Visiting one of these dwellings with a friend who knew the occupants, the old woman who did the honours of the house at the time accommodated us with stools, humbly apologising for the absence of 'the chair'. My friend inquired what had become of it, whereupon the venerable woman gave a full and true account of how it had been lent to a neighbour on the occasion of a call from the minister, and had progressed from house to house for the same purpose, and had not yet returned.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, three-legged stools and benches constructed of planks of wood resting on stones or turf, were the most common seats at this time (Mitchell 1880: 51).

Two of the Phase 3 houses, 35 and 19a, contain ground level alcoves built into the thickness of the wall (see Figure 26). I have been unable to determine the exact

purpose of these alcoves. However it is likely that they were used for storing milk or water, where they might be less easily knocked over.

Figure 26: Ground-level alcove in house 19(a), South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2002)

On the existence of windows, we have adequate documentary evidence to suggest that, in the mid 1860s, the houses, as a rule, did not have windows. Both Thomas (1867: 155) and Mitchell (1880: 54) concur:

> There is no glazed window. Nay – there is frequently not even a hole in the wall for the admission of light. The absence of this is very general in the old Lewis house of the type I am describing. Such light as gains admission enters by the door, or through one or two small holes in the eaves of the roof at the top of the wall, or through chinks from deficiencies in the construction of the roof (Mitchell 1880: 54).

Nicolson (1866: 12) also comments that '[w]indows in the wall are a rare extravagance. Usually there is just a single pane in the lower part of the roof.' In other words, a pane of glass had been inserted into a hole made in the thatch, just above the wall-head.

In 1861, the census began asking how many rooms in each house contained 'one or more windows'. In that year, the returns for South Bragar (including Fivig) show that none of the sixty-eight houses contained any rooms with windows. In 1871,

however, of the seventy-nine houses in South Bragar, five houses had one room and two houses had two rooms that contained a window or windows. By 1881, of the seventy-six inhabited houses in South Bragar, there were 114 windowed rooms, with at least one in every house: forty-two had one room that contained a window or windows, thirty-one had two rooms, two had three rooms, and one had four rooms. By 1891, of the seventy-two houses in South Bragar, there were 159 windowed rooms, again with at least one in every house. By this time, just seven houses had only one room containing a window or windows, forty-four houses had two rooms, twenty houses had three rooms, and one house had four rooms (see Table 3). Interestingly, by 1901, the number of houses with three or more rooms containing one or more windows fell from twenty-one to six. Fifty-one houses had two rooms containing one or more windows, and twenty one houses had one room. This could be due to changes in the enumerator's definition of 'window' or of 'room', or it may be that some windows actually disappeared during this ten year period.

Table 3: Windows in South Bragar houses, 1841-1901

	Number of houses containing windowed rooms						
Rooms with windows	**1841**	**1851**	**1861**	**1871**	**1881**	**1891**	**1901**
None	-	-	**68**	**72**	**0**	**0**	**0**
One	-	-	**0**	**5**	**42**	**7**	**21**
Two	-	-	**0**	**2**	**31**	**44**	**51**
Three	-	-	**0**	**0**	**2**	**20**	**4**
Four	-	-	**0**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Five	-	-	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**
Total windowed rooms	-	-	**0**	**9**	**114**	**159**	**144**
Total houses	**67**	**65**	**68**	**79**	**76**	**72**	**78**

The precise definition of the term 'window' that was adopted for the purpose of the various censuses is not known. The physical evidence shows that not every house in

Phase 3 had windows built into the walls.[75] House 35, for example, which dates to the time of the second-lotting, is still standing to a height which would have shown any windows, had there been any. The same is true of House 19(a) and House 27(b). Evidence provided by the Napier Commission (1884) and the Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes (Dilke 1885) also suggests that few houses had 'upright windows' (i.e. windows in the walls) by the mid-1880s, and it will be shown in Chapter 7 that upright windows were not introduced in Bragar and Arnol until sometime after 1905 (Dittmar and Millar 1905). The increase in the census results from only seven houses containing windows in 1871 to all seventy-six houses containing windows in 1881, suggests that the term 'windows' did not refer solely to windows built into the walls, but also to windows inserted into the base of the thatch. It is thus possible that the census committee changed its definition of 'window' between 1871 and 1881, to include windows in the thatch. However, it is perhaps more likely that the use of glazing in window-openings (or simply holes) in the thatch increased between 1871 and 1881. This may have been the result of increased incomes during this period, particularly once the women started to earn a living at the seasonal herring fishing. Both men and woman would have had the opportunity to purchase glass, if not in Stornoway, then at the various fishing ports they may have visited. While it is possible that glazing was provided for tenants by the proprietor, there is insufficient documentary evidence to support this.

Other information indirectly provided by the census returns (Table 3) relates to the number of rooms that each house was perceived to have. The results show that, regardless of the definition of the term 'window', from 1881, a number of houses were deemed to have at least three 'rooms', and one to have at least four.[76] This perhaps suggests that, by this time, there was some form of partitioning evident in the house (perhaps simply the back of a dresser or the back of a box-bed), which defined a byre, a living area, and a sleeping area. It is perhaps surprising that some houses had as many as three 'rooms' with windows because it is unlikely that there

[75] Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify the houses surveyed for this thesis in the census returns.

[76] It is probable that the house that contained five rooms with a window or windows noted in the 1901 census was a newly built stone and lime house, perhaps with an upper storey. It is also possible that the house that contained four rooms with a window or windows noted in the census returns from 1881 was also a new stone and lime house.

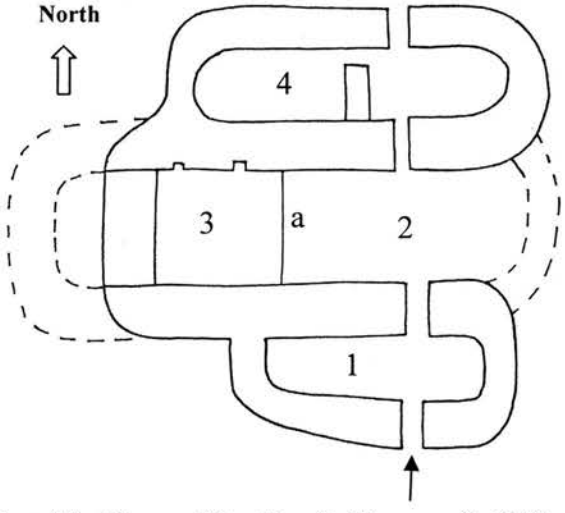
would have been 'windows' with glazing in the byre or the barn. It is possible, therefore, that the term 'window' did not necessitate the use of glazing.

6.11.2 The Phase 4 Houses

The Phase 4 houses are those which were built after the second lotting but before the second OS survey of the island, which took place in 1895. Of the houses I surveyed, more of them belong to this Phase than to any other.

The written evidence, as discussed throughout this chapter, suggests that the houses, in general, did not undergo any significant changes during the second half of the nineteenth century, as most tenants refused to implement the modifications proposed by the proprietor and by the local authorities.

The physical evidence shows that the Phase 4 houses were roughly the same size as the Phase 3 houses. Many of them consisted of a *fosglan*, byre-dwelling, and barn, although some of houses, for example 24, 25, and 43, do not appear to have had a *fosglan*. A number of the houses in Phase 4 are of unclear layout, particularly houses 5(b) and 14(b). The byre-dwelling unit in house 49(a) has clearly been shortened at the living end (Plan 10). In this case, the end wall had fallen into disrepair and, as the only occupant of the house was an old man, it was decided simply to build a new wall and shorten the room, rather than repair the old wall (Inf. A).



Phase 4

1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

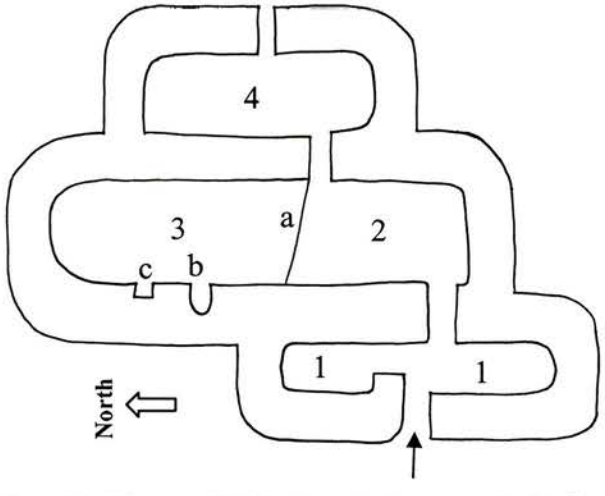
a. step up to living area

Note: Dotted line indicates that only a vague outline of these walls can be seen on the ground.

Plan 10: House 49a, South Bragar (1:250)

Three of the Phase 4 houses, 27(a), 43, and 49(a), also had shelves built into the walls. Figure 27 shows both a shelf and a ground-level alcove in the living area of house 27(a). The ground plan of the house is shown in Plan 11.

Figure 27: Shelf and ground-level alcove in house 27(a), South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)



Phase 4

1. fosglan
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

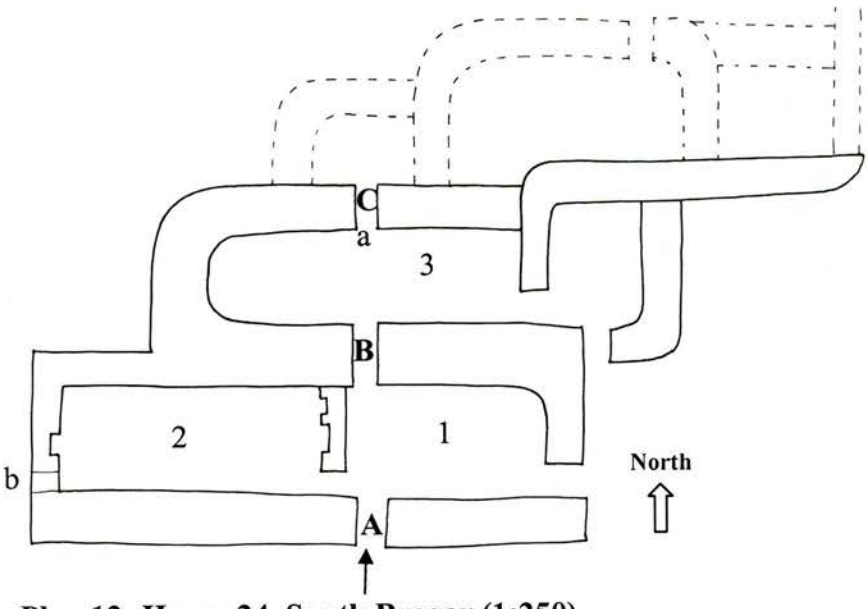
a. step up to living area
b. ground level alcove
c. shelf (see Figure 27)

Plan 11: House 27(a), South Bragar (1:250)

A number of the houses in Phase 4, for example houses 24 and 25, have gable ends with chimneys at the upper end of the house and partition walls containing hearths in the living area. The written evidence suggests that these features were introduced in the early twentieth century and we can therefore assume that they were a later addition in the Phase 4 houses. A number of the Phase 4 houses have upright windows, and it is likely that these were also added in the early twentieth century. In houses 4 and 24, windows have been introduced during the process of re-building part of the walls at this end of the house to include a gable-end (Plan 12). The introduction of upright windows, chimneys and gable and partition walls will be discussed in Chapter 7.

A number of the Phase 4 houses have opposing doors. Very often the entrance to the *fosglan*, the entrance from the *fosglan* to the byre dwelling, the entrance from the byre-dwelling into the barn, and even the low-doorway or winnowing hole (*toll-fasgnaidh*) in the back wall of the barn, were all built in a line (see Figure 28, Plan 12 and Plan 13). One of the reasons for this seems to have been to enable a through draught when all four doors were open, in order to aid in the process of winnowing, which would take place in the barn (Fenton 1995: 14). It can also be seen that doorways are generally situated at the upper end of the byre, between the byre and the living area, and the position of the step between the byre and the living area shows that the cattle, by this time, were generally taking up no more than half of the byre-dwelling area, rather than two-thirds. This can be seen clearly in house 19(b) (Plan 13).

Doorways were often low, particularly those from the byre-dwelling into the barn. In house 24, for example, the door leading into the byre-dwelling unit was 1.72m high, while the door from the byre-dwelling unit into the barn was only 1.33m high (Figure 28, Figure 29, and Plan 12). As in Phase 3, a number of the Phase 4 houses have a doorway in the end-wall of the byre (e.g. house 24, Plan 12). It is likely that these were later additions as evidence suggests that, by 1905, the houses in Bragar still had only one doorway (Dittmar and Millar 1905).



Plan 12: House 24, South Bragar (1:250)

Phase 4

1. byre
2. living area
3. barn

a. winnowing hole
b. window

A, **B**, and **C**: see Figure 28

Note: Dotted lines indicate that only a vague outline of these walls can be seen on the ground.

Phase 4

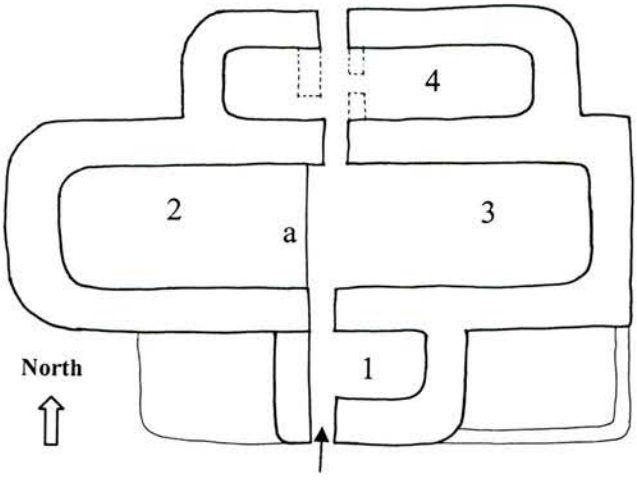
A. main door into byre-dwelling

B. door from byre-dwelling into barn

C. winnowing hole in barn

Figure 28: Opposing doorways and winnowing hole in house 24, South Bragar

(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)



Phase 4

1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

a. step up to living area

Plan 13: House 19(b), South Bragar (1:250)

Figure 29: Doorway from the barn into the byre, house 24, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

The houses in Phase 5 (i.e. the houses built post-1895) will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that many Highland estates were being sold in the early to mid-nineteenth century, and that Matheson's purchase of the island may, to some extent, have been part of an attempt to raise the status of his family name. It has shown that Matheson was interested, not only in Agricultural Improvement, but also in the social and cultural improvement of the islanders, challenging their notions of sanitation, gender and privacy, and their agricultural practices, and showing the inherent differences between his own *genre de vie*, and that of his tenants.

Improved housing was believed to be essential to the 'Improvement' of all areas of society and culture. Both the proprietor and the District Committee tried to implement housing improvements during this period – Matheson through Rules and Regulations, and the District Committee through building regulations and bye-laws. Neither was wholly successful and by 1900 most of the houses in Lewis remained unimproved.

The Crofters Act of 1886 granted the tenants security of tenure, fixed rents, and compensation for improvements, which were regarded as the main impediments to housing improvement in the Highlands and Islands. This chapter has shown that in fact these securities did very little to encourage tenants in Lewis to improve their houses, and that there were other reasons behind their resistance to change. It has been shown that, while settlement change was accepted through necessity, housing change was neither necessary nor advantageous, and was strongly resisted for socio-cultural and environmental reasons. It has also been suggested that resistance to housing change was partly due to a desire to retain a material representation of the community's social structures, which had previously also been played out through the pre-lotting settlement structure.

Despite their resistance to housing change, changes can be seen in the way of life of the people over this period. The tenants' desire to improve their position and their growing dependence on the outside world can be seen from the increase of purchased goods during the second half of the nineteenth century. This can be accounted for, in part, by the availability of 'ready money' and increased communication with the mainland, through the greater involvement of the islanders in the fishing industry.

Chapter 7

The Twentieth Century

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the changes that took place in society, culture, and housing on Lewis during the twentieth century. Upon James Matheson's death in 1879, the estate fell to his wife, Lady Matheson. Upon her death in 1896 the estate was left to James' nephew, Mr. Donald Matheson, who, in 1899, handed it over to his son Major (later Colonel) Duncan Matheson (MacKenzie 1903: 494-95). In 1918 the island was sold to Lord Leverhulme of Port Sunlight.

This chapter will look first at the period from 1900 to 1914, during which time a number of reports were compiled which discussed the sanitary condition of the houses in Lewis and elsewhere. The chapter will then move on to the First World War and the inter-war period, looking at the effects of Leverhulme's purchase of the island, and of economic change during this time. This section will also look at the developments that were taking place within the older houses at that time, in particular, the movement of the hearth. The chapter will finish by looking at the influence of the Second World War, and at the changes that occurred, in society, culture, and housing, during the post-war years. This section will focus on the move to new houses and on the changes which took place within the older houses, and will look particularly at the introduction of plumbed water and electricity into rural Lewis.

7.1 The Pre-War Years (1900-1914)

By the beginning of the twentieth century, improvements had begun in formal education and communication. More children were being educated since the 1872 Education Act, which took education out of the hands of the Church and charitable bodies and into State control, and particularly from the early 1880s onwards when

grants were offered to relieve school fees (Brand 1902: xxxiii).[77] Due to an increase in disposable income throughout the 1850s to the 1880s, purchased items had become more common, and both men and women were now travelling regularly to the mainland as they followed the seasonal herring fishing. Income was mainly from the fishing industry, but many women had found jobs in domestic service in cities such as Glasgow, and most young men were also receiving a retaining fee after joining the Militia or the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) (Ballantyne 1917: 213; Ballantyne 1921: 213, 464; MacDonald 1990: 121). The Highlands and Islands Medical Service Committee reported in 1912 that 'over 4000 Lewis men are being trained in arms' (Dewar 1912: 9). There was also the added income from family members who had either moved to the mainland to find work, or who had emigrated, and were sending money home (Ballantyne 1917: 211; Ballantyne 1921: e.g. 434, 447, 462).

7.1.1 Health and Housing

The pro-active approach to housing improvement through legislation that was characteristic of the nineteenth century gave way, in the early twentieth century, to a pro-active approach through education, focusing on health and sanitation. Possibly fuelled by concerns about the increased spread of fevers and diseases such as typhoid, typhus and, particularly, tuberculosis into the Islands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Dewar 1912: 9; Ballantyne 1921: 447; Gibson 1925; Ferguson 2003: 245), a number of reports were commissioned, in the early twentieth century, which looked at the sanitary conditions prevalent in the Highlands and Islands, and at the medical services available in these areas. Of primary concern was the unsanitary condition of the houses and the quality of the water supply.

7.1.1.1 The Four Reports

In 1905, a report was undertaken by the Local Government Board for Scotland to assess the *Sanitary Condition of the Lews* (Dittmar and Millar 1905). The two Inspectors visited seven townships: Back and Tong in the parish of Stornoway, Arnol

[77] For more information on education in Lewis in the nineteenth century see Brand (1902: xxiii-xxxvii).

and Bragar in Barvas, and Leurbost, Balallan and Arivruach in Lochs. Their *Report* contains much useful information regarding the condition of houses throughout Lewis at the time. From their description of the various townships it can be seen that the quality of housing varied, both between and within townships. In each of the townships, for example, there were a small number of good quality houses built of stone and lime or cement, and with felt or slate roofs, which did not house cattle. The majority of houses, however, were of the traditional dry-stone, thatched, byre-dwelling type.

In 1912, the Highlands and Islands Medical Service Committee, chaired by John A. Dewar, was established by the government, to 'consider at an early date how far the provision of medical attendance in districts situated in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland is inadequate, and to advise as to the best method of securing a satisfactory medical service therein' (Dewar 1912: 2). The Commissioners spent three days in Lewis hearing evidence from eighteen witnesses as to the health provision in the island and touching on the unsanitary condition of both old and new houses. The eighteen witnesses comprised six doctors, two ministers, a variety of other authorities, one crofter/merchant, and one cottar.

In 1917, *Scottish Mothers and Children* reported on 'the Physical Welfare of Mothers and Young Children' in Scotland. The report was compiled by W. Leslie MacKenzie, a member of the Local Government Board for Scotland, and was funded by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (MacKenzie 1917: v). Similar reports were compiled for England and Wales. In the Scottish report, a number of areas in Scotland were chosen as 'Special Studies', one of which was the Outer Hebrides. This study was undertaken by Dr. Mary Menzies, Lady Medical Inspector under the Local Government Board, and by Miss Bertram Ireland (MacKenzie 1917: 393). Within the Outer Hebrides, regional studies were undertaken in Lewis, Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, and South Uist, where Dr. Menzies and Miss Ireland visited around

two hundred houses. In Lewis, details are given for two eastern, and three western, townships, none of which is named.[78]

Of significant interest to this thesis, was the Royal Commission *Report on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland Rural and Urban*, chaired by Sir Henry Ballantyne (hereafter referred to as the 'Ballantyne Commission'). The Commission was appointed in 1912, and in 1913 travelled throughout Scotland gathering evidence, resulting in the publication of its *Report* in 1917 (Ballantyne 1917). The Commission spent three days in Lewis, receiving evidence from fourteen witnesses. Much useful information can be found in the evidence they collected, which was published separately in 1921 (Ballantyne 1921), and the *Report* itself is indicative of the attitudes and feelings of the day. Both the *Evidence* and the *Report* highlight where improvements had and had not taken place, describe the changes, and suggest the core reasons for these changes and continuities. It should be noted, however, that the fourteen people interviewed in Lewis comprised mostly doctors, nurses, and schoolmasters, and not one was a crofter, cottar, or squatter (Ballantyne 1921).

These four reports contain invaluable information as to the condition of houses during the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War, and the developments that were taking place during that time. They also provide information on the attitude of the authorities, and of the tenants, to housing in the early twentieth century. The reports show that there was a great variety of housing conditions throughout the Highlands and Islands, and that, in Lewis, conditions could differ quite considerably both between and even within townships. They also inform us that although some tenants had become very keen to improve their houses, or to build new houses, others were still reluctant. Some of the main points brought up by these reports will now be discussed.

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[78] Although this document was published three years after the end of the period in question, the information it contains relates more to this period than to the period under consideration in the next section (1914-1939).

7.1.1.2 Improvements to Existing Houses

Dittmar and Millar's *Report* shows that, by 1905, a number of improvements had been made to existing houses in Lewis, but that the level of improvement varied widely throughout the island. In Back, for example, although they found that there were varying 'degrees of badness' with regard to the condition of the houses, in general they found that most houses had a timber partition between the byre and the living area, a timber partition between the living and sleeping areas, and often one, sometimes two, small windows in the wall. They also found that '[t]he inside walls of the living and sleeping rooms are in most cases covered with a thin layer of clay which is white-washed' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 4). According to MacDonald (1990: 60), this practice began after the cholera outbreaks in the Highlands in 1832, although the disease does not seem to have reached the Western Isles (Day 1918: 87). One example of the variety of housing to be found within one township can be found in their description of the walling materials. In Back, the inspectors found that, in addition to the traditional dry-stone construction, '[o]ccasionally part of the walls (usually at the living and sleeping-room end) are of stone and lime.' However it was also found that '[s]ometimes they are formed wholly of turf' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 4). Also, in some of the houses you walked *past* the manure in the byre to reach the living area, whereas in others you had to walk *over* it (ibid.: 6). In the living area, the inspectors found there were generally 'a few chairs and a wooden bench or two, with, in some cases, a dresser' (ibid.: 4).

In Arnol, apart from the three newly constructed stone and lime houses, all of the houses were found to be 'grossly insanitary, and could be certified as a nuisance under the Public Health Act' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 7). These houses had no partition between the byre and the living area, no windows, and no clay on the inside walls. Interestingly, most of them did have a timber partition between the living and sleeping areas (ibid.: 7) and a comparison can be drawn between this practice, and a similar practice in traditional Welsh long-houses. In many Welsh houses (see Peate 1944), the byre-end of the house was at a lower level than the rest of the house, which generally resulted in a step up from the byre to the kitchen, as we have seen to be the case in most Lewis houses of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In

some Welsh houses, however, the change in floor level occurred not between the byre and the kitchen, but between the kitchen and the sleeping area, which was at the end of the house (Peate 1944: 57). This division of space is interesting and unusual by modern standards and is worthy of further investigation.

The inspectors entered around fifteen houses in Arnol, and in all of them they found a bed in the living-room (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 7). Many houses in Crossbost also had a box-bed in the living room, at least by 1913 (Ballantyne 1921: 442).[79] Within these houses it was found that '[o]n the whole, the state of poverty of the inmates was even more abject than in Back and Tong, as in some cases there were neither chairs nor wooden seats, but merely a plank resting on large boulders on the floor' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 7). The only light came into the house 'through a pane of glass in the thatch about a foot square' (ibid.: 7). In these houses, to get to the living area you had to 'walk over and sink into the manure' (ibid.: 7). The inspectors distinguished between two types of houses in Arnol – those that had a double *fosglan*, in which 'one enters the byre by a narrow and low passage, on either side of which is a horse stable and a sheep-pen', and those that were entered directly from outside (ibid.: 7). In the opinion of the inspectors, neither type was any better or worse than the other:

> It is quite impossible to single out any particular house or set of houses which are worse than any others. They are all in a state that can only be called appalling.
>
> The whole township and every house in it is uninhabitable and should be condemned, except the three or four stone and lime built ones.
>
> (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 7-8)

In Bragar, the houses seem to have been similar to those found in Arnol, although the *Report* does not present as much information on the Bragar houses, except to describe one house in which two paupers lived, as it 'presented the worst features we have yet met among houses of this shockingly insanitary type' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 8):

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[79] The significance of these box-beds will be discussed below.

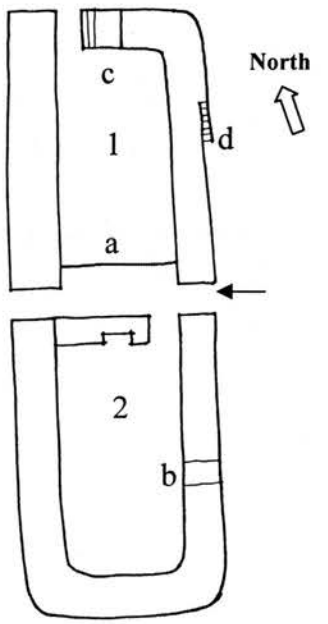
> There was only a wooden plank on the earth floor, resting on stones (at least that is all one could make out in the darkness), and no vestige of a bed, or bedding.
>
> In this awful den, not fit for a pig, there are housed two wretched old paupers, who are compelled to crouch over the peat fire all night as there is no bed to retire to. One of the cows had a most suspicious hacking cough.
>
> (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 8)

In the township of Leurbost, in the parish of Lochs, conditions seem to have varied; some houses had a partition between the byre and the living area, whereas others did not. In general, the inspectors found conditions in the Lochs townships similar to those they had experienced in the parishes of Barvas and in Stornoway, with the exception of the township of Laxay (which they merely passed through), where they found the houses were 'to a large extent of an improved type and do not permit of cattle-housing' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 9-10).

The 1905 report therefore shows that improvements were being made to existing houses (for example the introduction of windows and of timber partitions), but that there were significant differences in the condition of houses between and within townships.

By 1913, most houses in Crossbost had been improved with windows sometime within the previous fifteen years (Ballantyne 1921: 437) and most had a partition between the living and sleeping areas which, in some cases, reached the roof (Ballantyne 1917: 442). However, there were still many houses that, by 1913, did not have a partition between the byre and the living area (Ballantyne 1921: 450). The schoolmaster at Carloway commented, in 1913, that in many houses you did not have to go through the byre to reach the living area, and that even in those where you did have to go through the byre, you can do so with 'no difficulty' (ibid.: 462). As we have seen in the last chapter, a comparison of the house plans from Phases 1, 2, 3, and 4 shows the movement of the door from the byre-end to the middle of the house. All four of the Phase 5 houses have the door in the middle of the house, between the byre and the living area (see Plan 14). By 1913 there is also mention of wallpaper

(known in Lewis as '*bolt*') being put up in some of the houses in Crossbost and Leurbost (Ballantyne 1921: 443).



Phase 5

1. byre
2. living area

a. step up to living area
b. window
c. *toll-each*
d. external stair

Plan 14: House 15(b), South Bragar (1:250)

By 1917, other improvements had started to appear. In some houses a gable wall of stone and lime, and containing a chimney, was built at the sleeping end of the house (MacKenzie 1917: 442, 446). There is no mention of this improvement in the evidence given before the Ballantyne Commission in 1913 (Ballantyne 1921) which suggests that gable-end chimneys may have been introduced between 1913 and 1917. It is unlikely, however, that such improvements would have been introduced during the First World War, with so many of the menfolk away, and it is therefore probable that some chimneys had been introduced prior to 1913, and that the practice began to spread before the start of the War.

Despite such improvements, by 1917, many houses still did not have a partition wall separating the byre and the living area. In the two eastern townships visited for *Scottish Mothers and Children*, of the forty-nine houses in which children were born during the period of investigation, the majority had no timber partition between the byre and the living area, but instead a partition was formed 'by the back of the

dresser in which the food was kept, or the back of a bed' (MacKenzie 1917: 442). It was shown in Chapter 6 that the dresser was often positioned 'with its back to the cattle' (Thomas 1867: 156; Mitchell 1880: 52). By 1917, wallpaper was also being used in some of the houses in western districts: 'The inside appearance of some of the turf and stone black houses was improved by wallpaper suspended from a cord fixed along the top of the wall' (MacKenzie 1917: 446). This method of fixing wallpaper was also mentioned to me by an informant (Inf. A).

Some tenants who improved their houses, however, were not altogether happy with the results. The Medical Service Committee reported that some people had complained that 'since they have put up the partition the house is not nearly so healthy' (Dewar 1912: 266). Interestingly, I heard from Dr. Finlay MacLeod (pers. comm.) that an old man he knew had found that when he built a stone partition wall between the living area and the byre, there followed an infestation of black beetles behind the wall on the byre side; this may have had to do with the area being colder than it was previously.

7.1.1.3 New Houses

New houses had begun to be built when Dittmar and Millar carried out their inspection in 1905. In Back, for example, of approximately one hundred to one hundred and twenty houses, the inspectors counted 'nine houses of superior construction, that is, of stone and lime, or of cement, or with cement gable walls, and roofed with slate or felt' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 4). In Bragar, of around one hundred and twenty houses, six were of stone and lime, and another three such houses were under construction (ibid.: 8). Between 1890 and 1913, Ballantyne (1921: 447) informs us that 1200 new houses were built in Lewis, at an average cost of £100 each.

From evidence given in the four reports, it is clear that money for the building of new houses was coming from three different sources. Firstly, a number of tenants seem to have been wealthy enough to afford to build new houses with their own money, and in many cases the wealthiest tenants in the township seem to have been the

cottars and squatters. In Back and Tong it was found that the houses of the cottars and squatters were 'as a rule, in all respects, superior to the crofters' houses, and, indeed, in the majority of instances, are the only habitable houses in the place' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 4). In these townships, most of the cottars and squatters, both the men and the young women, earned their living by following the seasonal fishing, which would have provided them with a decent income. It was also noted that the cottars and squatters of Bragar and Arnol did not go to the fishing, 'and the result is greater poverty than in the townships of Back and Tong' (ibid.: 8). The squatters, and also some cottars, would also have had no outlay on rent or rates, which the crofters would have had to pay. Only one of the cottar and squatter houses visited in Back was a byre-dwelling, and in this house there was 'a clean swept passage about 3 feet in width between byre and living-room' (ibid.: 5-6). This house had a felt roof over the living-end of the house, and a wooden floor in the bedroom. It also had a damp course, and the living-end was 'mason built', with pointed stonework at the byre-end (ibid.: 12).[80]

Secondly, some new houses were built with the aid of a £50 loan from the Congested Districts Board or, after 1912, from the Board of Agriculture. The Congested Districts Board was able to offer loans for the building of new houses only where a new holding had been created (Ballantyne 1921: 273). The Board of Agriculture, however, was able to give loans to build new houses on existing holdings, and also for the improvement of existing holdings (Day 1918: 377; Ballantyne 1921: 215, 274). Between 1912 and 1914, however, only sixty-three crofters in Lewis took up the offer of a loan (Ballantyne 1917: 440), and evidence from one witness suggests that many crofters could not have afforded the repayments (Ballantyne 1921: 443-44). It was also noted, however, that the Board of Agriculture could only offer loans to those tenants whose crofter status was undisputed (i.e. they were not cottars and squatters), and presumably not to those who had cottars residing on their land

[80] The inspectors make no mention of separate byres for the new houses but it must be assumed that either a separate byre was built, or that tenants' cattle were housed in the byre of the original house on the lot.

(Ballantyne 1917: 440). This, as much as anything, would have reduced the number of tenants eligible for a loan.[81]

Thirdly, and most commonly, houses were funded with the help of money sent by relatives who were working on the mainland or who had emigrated (Ballantyne 1921: e.g. 457, 461).

Some of the new houses, however, were not of particularly good quality. In 1917, MacKenzie (1917: 442) described the three types of houses that were to be found in two unnamed eastern townships in Lewis:

> (1) The black house consisting of byre, living-room, and sleeping-room. No chimney, or sometimes a chimney in the sleeping-room gable. (2) The badly constructed white house with clay floors. (3) The fairly built white house with stone and lime, or wooden walls, chimney, concrete or wooden floors.

In western Lewis, of the thirty-three houses examined,

> 4 were black houses constructed of turf; 14 were black houses of stone or stone and cement; 4 were improved black houses having chimneys; 8 were white houses of a poor type; and 3 were white houses of a good type (MacKenzie 1917: 446).

It was noted in MacKenzie (ibid.: 431) that if the traditional house was built on a dry-site and without cattle housing, it would be much healthier than 'the so-called "white houses," which tend to repeat the worst vices of the worst-built houses of the mainland, and frequently have neither the freedom of ventilation nor the warmth of the black houses.' It was also suggested that '[t]he white house when badly kept is much dirtier and insanitary than the average black house is in the summer-time', i.e. when there are no cattle in the house (MacKenzie 1917: 442). Geddes (1955: 84) also comments on the problems of ventilation in many of the new houses, stating that:

> The early 'white' houses, with an attic lit by skylight, were airtight, for the windows were too often fixed or only opened at the bottom. The door was left open in warm weather, but it was not high enough to allow the escape of the stale, upper layer of air which the women breathed as they did their cooking and baking.

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[81] One informant told me that people were very wary at first of taking out loans from the Board of Agriculture due to a lack of trust in the Government, based on past-experiences (Inf. K).

In his article in the *Caledonian Medical Journal*, Gibson (1925: 214-15) explained that part of the problem was that the people moving into these new houses did not know that they need ventilating:

> To put a family straight from a Black House into a White, before they understand its essential differences, is rather like promoting the driver of a Ford car to the care of a Rolls-Royce without any preliminary training. Something is bound to go wrong.
>
> The Black House is a self-ventilator; the White House requires to be aired. The presence of windows in the latter does not always exert a helpful influence, as some islandmen dislike the sudden, straight inrush of air, which a raised sash causes, and so prefer to keep it shut.

Gibson (1925: 125) goes on to describe the defects in some of the 'White Houses' he has seen:

> In some windows the upper sash does not come down. I have seen windows placed so low that it is necessary to bend almost double to look out of them. In one place I met with a house built of cement with a tin roof, which appeared, from the impermeability of its walls and covering, to present all the defects of the lower deck of a steamship. There are rooms without fireplaces, houses with the door and all the windows to the front, and no openings whatsoever at the back, the opportunities for through ventilation being practically non-existent.

Presumably the openings were on the side of the house that was less exposed to the weather.

In North Uist, the Medical Services Committee found that although the new houses had a chimney in each end, the sleeping end of the house was often damp as a fire was rarely lit there:

> The houses which are being built just now are built with chimneys in each end. The one end is the kitchen and it is pretty dry and quite sanitary, but the end that they sleep in has rarely a fire in it. It is plastered inside and out, and it has no effective ventilation. [...] They have got the ventilation right enough in principle, but the house gets damp for want of a fire. [...] Take my house; if you leave the room a couple of days without a fire in it the wall is quite damp. The crofters' houses are much the same (Dewar 1912: 290).

The district bye-laws of 1900, designed to promote a decent standard of housing, were not always observed, although generally those houses that were built with the help of a mason were better constructed than those that were built solely by the crofters themselves (Ballantyne 1921: 441).

Figure 30: Half 'blackhouse', half stone and lime 'whitehouse', new house on lot 27, South Bragar

(Photograph taken by the author, 2002)

Figure 31: Half 'blackhouse', half concrete 'whitehouse', house 9, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

Figure 32: House 9, concrete 'whitehouse' attached to the 'blackhouse' (left)
(Photograph taken by the author, 2002)

Often when a new house was built it was attached to the end of the old house (see Figure 30, Figure 31 and Figure 32). In some instances this was because the family could only afford to build part of a new house, and therefore both houses were lived in for a time, until the family could afford to complete the new house. Ferguson (2003: 170) describes this practice in *Children of the Black House*:

> Like many houses in the district, the architecture of the Boyken's house was a mixture of the ancient and the modern. Half of the old black-house built in the eighteenth century had been demolished and half of a conventional *taigh-geal* or white-house had been erected in its place. Built by the local handyman, the walls and single gable of the latter were made of poured concrete. Unlike the old thatched half to which it was abutted, the walls, floors and ceiling were built with due reference to geometry, with horizontal and vertical lines, and right angles where they ought to be! The deal roof was covered with felt which was weather proofed annually with a generous coating of tar.

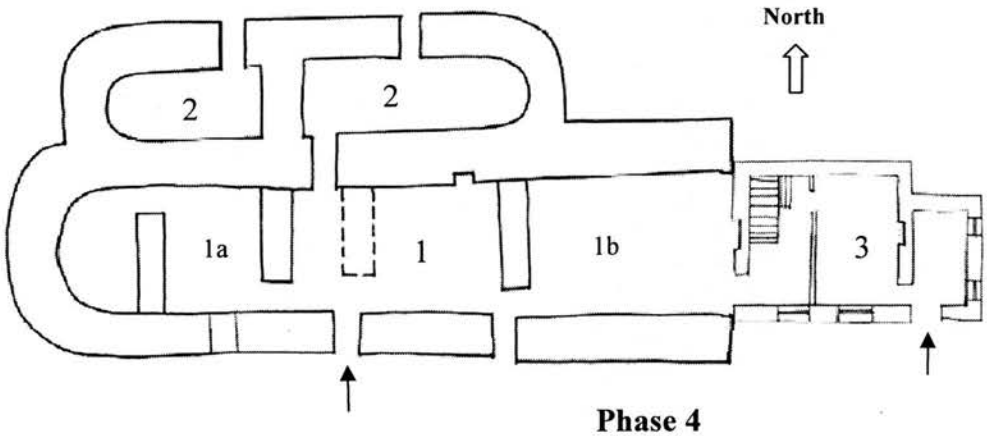
A number of witnesses before the Ballantyne Commission in 1912, stated that when a new house was attached to an old house, very often the old house was unnecessarily kept in use. One witness, Dr. Murray, stated that, 'in a good many cases', the old and new house were connected, 'and very often they live in a bit of the old black house. They have the peat fire in the centre of the floor. They keep the other part of the house for show' (Ballantyne 1921: 436). Another witness, Mr Fenton, the schoolmaster at Cross in Borve, stated that 'improvement in the houses here is more apparent than real' (ibid.: 459) as every new house was built next to the old house and it was in the old house that they cooked and ate. The new house was 'only kept as a sort of place to take the minister' (ibid.: 459). He also commented that '[v]ery often the marriageable daughters have the beds in the black houses so that the local courting customs may be maintained more easily' (ibid.: 459). He is referring here to the custom of '*caithris na h-oidhche*', or 'night visiting', whereby young men would visit their sweethearts at night and spend the night in bed beside them, fully clothed. This practice was also known as 'bundling' (Anderson Smith 1886: 79; cf. Smout 1986: 170-73). This was an accepted courting custom throughout the Highlands and Islands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and although the young men took pains to avoid being seen and heard by the girls' parents, it was generally accepted by the parents that this practice took place (Anderson Smith 1886: 79; CEATS, Folder SC).[82] In those houses where there was a '*leabaidh taobh an teine*' – a 'bed by the fire' in the living area – it was often the sleeping place either of the elderly members of the family (who would benefit from being close to the fire), or of the young women of marriageable age (several informants, including Inf. J, Inf. M, Inf. N, Inf. O).

One of the main barriers to improvement, according to Fenton (Ballantyne 1921: 459), was the reluctance of the people to completely separate the byre from the living area as they found it more convenient to have the two connected. He cites one instance of a new house being built against the old house but with no connection between them. The family lived in the new house for some time, but eventually

[82] See also the poem 'Suirigheach na cagailte' ('Courting by the fire'), by Uig bard Murchadh MacLeòid, for a humorous account of *caithris na h-oidhche* (MacLeòid 1969: 41-43).

> the old lady thought the trouble of going out the white house door and in by the byre door before they could get into the black house was too much, and she got the two houses knocked together, and from that day the byre door has been the door they go out and in at. And the black house has become the real living room. [...] That is what happens when a white house is built as an annexe to a black house. What I maintain is that while they are in that position the black house is the main house. The improvement is more apparent than real (Ballantyne 1921: 459-60).

It was also stated by one witness that, in some cases, 'the old people, who are very conservative, would not live in a white house; they like to have the warmth of the fire where they have their ceilidhs at night' (Ballantyne 1921: 458). Another witness confirmed that the older people preferred the old house to the new: 'if they get a white house they retain the black house and live in the black house' (Ballantyne 1921: 464), and another, that the black house was still used for the *cèilidh* (Ballantyne 1921: 466). One informant told me of an old woman who, when cooking bannocks, would return to the old house and cook them on the central hearth (Inf. A). In House 9, a new house was built attached to the old house at the top of the living area. The end-wall of the old house was taken down and the new house built onto the end. The adjoining gable wall was built with a hearth at the side of the old house, and with an interconnecting door (Plan 15 and Figure 33).



Phase 4

Plan 15: House 9, South Bragar (1:250)

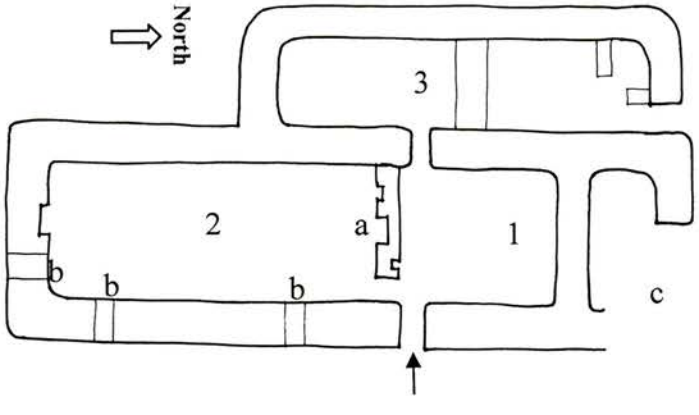
1. byre-dwelling
1a. byre-end
1b. living-end
2. *fosglan* or barn
3. new concrete dwelling-house

Note: It is unclear whether the partition walls of the thatched house were an original feature or a later addition.

Figure 33: Hearth in new concrete gable wall, house 9, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2002)

7.1.2 The Phase 5 Houses

Despite the number of new houses being built, houses of the old style, with the byre and the living area under the same roof, were still being built around 1910 (Dewar 1912: 261). It is impossible to determine when houses 6(a), 15(b), and 15(c) were built, however, it is likely to have been either in the very late nineteenth century (after 1895) or in the early twentieth century, possibly before the First World War. House 26(a) (Plan 16) was built around 1913 (Inf. D).



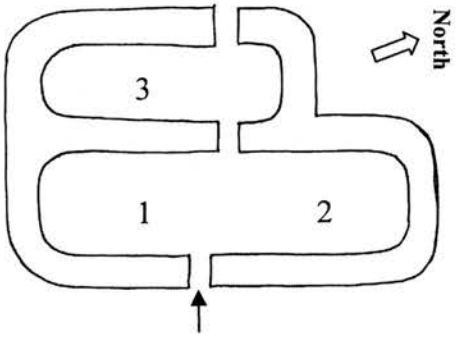
Phase 5

1. byre
2. living area
3. barn

a. partition wall with fireplace and shelving
b. window
c. area obscured by vegetation

Plan 16: House 26(a), South Bragar (1:250)

It is unclear whether the stone partition wall which housed the fireplace in house 26(a) was an original feature although it is likely that it was a later addition. The house was built, however, with a gable wall in the living/sleeping area, and three windows. None of the other Phase 5 houses have gable ends, although house 15(b) has a window in the living area (Plan 14). All four Phase 5 houses appear to be roughly the same size as the Phase 4 houses, with the exception of house 15(c) which is a little smaller (Plan 17).



Phase 5

1. byre
2. living area
3. barn

Plan 17: House 15(c), South Bragar (1:250)

7.1.3 Housing Change and Continuity

7.1.3.1 Process and Motivations

In the years prior to the First World War, there seems to have been the desire among many people, but not all, to build new houses, and to improve the houses they were in. By 1913, crofters were beginning to understand that they could get the same benefits from the manure, even if the cattle were housed in a byre that was not connected to the dwelling house (Ballantyne 1921: 462), although many tenants could not afford to build a separate byre, and did not have the space in which to do so. As one witness retorted: 'There is no use saying that they must build a separate byre and a good house for themselves unless they are able to do it. We have such a large variety of conditions to deal with' (ibid.: 467). A number of witnesses suggested that they thought most tenants would build new houses if they could get an affordable loan (ibid.: e.g. 445, 457, 471) and it was even suggested that the desire for a new home was discouraging some people from improving their existing houses (ibid.: 457).

Information provided in Dewar (1912), Ballantyne (1917, 1921), and MacKenzie (1917), suggests that housing change in the early twentieth century (both the improvement of existing houses, and the construction of new houses) was brought about by a process of emulation. As discussed above, change was made possible financially by the increased income of the tenants, either through their own exertions, or through the exertions of family members on the mainland or abroad, and by the provision of State loans. It is also possible that new houses were often built by those tenants who had relatives abroad, not simply because they were being sent money to build new houses, but also because the relatives, having experienced different housing conditions, were actively encouraging their families at home to build new houses. In other words, it may not have been a purely financial influence.

There seem to have been two types of emulation involved in the introduction and spread of change in Lewis houses in the early twentieth century. The first was emulation 'from the top down' and may be seen as a form of external diffusion (see Chapter 3). It generally resulted from the young women of the townships wanting to improve their circumstances by emulating the fashions and the housing styles of the mainland. Young women travelling to the mainland to follow the seasonal fishing industry, or to find work in the cities as domestic servants, experienced a different way of life which they then desired to emulate. Those women who did not travel would still have heard the stories from their female friends and relatives who had travelled, about a style of living very different from their own.

Many of the witnesses who gave evidence to the Ballantyne Commission noted the desire of women to 'improve' themselves and their lifestyles by emulating mainland habits. One witness stated that, '[s]ince the girls started going to the English fishing there has been a great improvement in the houses. I think they see things done much better when they go away, and there is greater variety in their cooking' (Ballantyne 1921: 441). The schoolmaster at Carloway commented that since he had instigated a yearly 'soiree', there had been great improvement 'in the matter of dress and tidiness in this community.' Young women, in particular, wanted to be well dressed, and

would 'write to their sisters in Glasgow and elsewhere and ask them to send nice things to put on at the soiree' (ibid.: 462). He also commented, that at weddings in the 1880s, '[y]ou would find very few knives on the table', whereas at a recent wedding, 'everyone at the table had a knife and fork' (ibid.: 462). He attributed this change entirely to the young women (ibid.: 462). The Chief Surveyor of the Board of Agriculture noted the influence of women on housing change, stating that

> in the Lews a good many of the daughters and sons go away to the East Coast Fishing; these girls, when they go to Yarmouth say, lodge in quite nice houses, and when they come back to the Lewis they are dissatisfied with the old houses, and probably urge the old people to build better houses; and they assist with money from their savings. I think that is how the houses are going up in the Lews at present (Ballantyne 1921: 275).

It was also noted in MacKenzie (1917: 446), that '[t]he women who, as fish-workers, had travelled furthest afield, especially those who had been to some of the English centres, seemed to have a desire for better housing.' According to MacKenzie (1917: 432),

> [t]he new houses are the direct result of the working-power of the people, who have contributed their recruits to industry and commerce in every country, [...] The white houses are part of the return. Labour is one of the exports; houses are one of the imports.

In some cases, however, it was the men who desired to emulate better houses. One witness commented that men who had emigrated, particularly to Canada, and then returned home, were often no longer satisfied with their old houses, and started building new ones:

> It is the young men who have been away for five or six years in Canada, and who come home to spend the winter, who usually build the new houses. They are no longer satisfied with the condition of things, and the first thing they do is to set about building a new house' (Ballantyne 1921: 462).

The second type of emulation, which led to the spread of change throughout the island, was a form of 'internal diffusion' (see Chapter 3). Once a tenant had introduced a change into his, or her, house, very often other tenants in the township followed suit. In South Harris it was found that

> [w]henever a crofter started improving his house his neighbours tried to do the same. In the townships and districts where no crofter has tried to improve his house, all the houses are the same. It is my experience that if one crofter builds

> a good house the others will strive to do the same, and they would rather go supperless to bed and have a decent house than not be equal to their neighbours (Ballantyne 1917: 211).

The schoolmaster of Bayble in Lewis also commented that the presence of 'white houses' in a township tends to lead to emulation: 'I consider that it creates a great deal of emulation amongst the people. It is a case of – "If you have a good house I will try to get one too"' (Ballantyne 1921: 466).

Tenants were also given a great deal of encouragement to improve their houses, and their health in general, from those in a position of authority, such as ministers, schoolmasters, and nurses (Ballantyne 1921). For example, public lectures were given on the dangers of using water from contaminated wells (ibid.: 445), and nurses advised mothers about childcare and about sanitation in the home (ibid.: 465). Some new houses were built after house plans were distributed to schools on the island, and children were encouraged to make copies and take them home to their parents. 'It bore the fruit in several parishes, especially at Shawbost, where the schoolmaster told me that the parents of some of the children had built after the designs we sent them' (ibid.: 274).

7.1.3.2 Barriers to Housing Change

There were still, however, some barriers to housing change in Lewis. Comparing the conditions they found in Lewis in 1905 with those they found elsewhere in the Western Isles at the time, Dittmar and Millar (1905: 10) commented that,

> [a]s the natural conditions are similar in both counties (although there would seem to be more congestion in the Lews), we fail to understand why, with an efficient public Health administration, the disgraceful housing conditions in the Lews should not be improved.

By 1905, cattle housing had been virtually abolished in Harris and in Benbecula. In North Uist and in Barra there were 'still a few cases', and although cattle housing did exist 'to a considerable extent' in South Uist, proceedings were underway to deal with the problem (ibid.: 10). In Lewis, cattle housing was still the norm.

The Ballantyne Commission also found that, while there was some improvement in Lewis housing, the rate of improvement was extremely slow, particularly when

compared with that of neighbouring islands. In part, they put this down to the fact that the other islands were 'more manageable units of administration alike for the estate and local public authorities' (Ballantyne 1917: 215). The evidence certainly showed that the public authorities in Lewis were in a position to do only so much to improve housing. The District Committee had limited financial resources and also limited authority to implement legislation. In his statement to the Ballantyne Commission, the Chairman of the Committee stated that 'owing to the Public Health Rate levied by the Committee being 1s. per £, the maximum rate allowed under the Public Health Act, the Committee could not make much effort to improve the housing accommodation in their district' (Ballantyne 1921: 447). The District Committee had no authority to prevent insanitary houses being built, only to prevent them from being occupied, and '[o]nce a house is put up you can hardly prevent a family removing into it when they have nowhere else to go' (ibid.: 437). Also, although the Committee had the authority to pull down insanitary houses and those built without the proprietor's permission, 'before we can do that we must make provision for a new home for them. That has been our main difficulty all along' (ibid.: 448). The Committee also had no legal backing to enforce the removal of tenants unwilling to move from insanitary dwellings, as such proceedings applied only to 'occupiers', whereas the tenants were classed as 'owners' as they paid no rent for their houses, paying only for their croft-land (ibid.: 323).

The distinction between owners and occupiers also seems to have raised problems with regard to the responsibility for housing improvements. Duncan Matheson refused responsibility by refuting ownership, despite the fact that he was listed as the owner on the Valuation Roll, on the grounds that he did not receive rent for the dwelling, and could therefore not be held responsible for carrying out improvements to crofter-housing (Ballantyne 1921: 323). Matheson also seemed unwilling to make more land available for new holdings for cottars and squatters. The report of the Ballantyne Commission commented that

> while Colonel Matheson has in the past admitted the desirability of a general scheme of migration from insanitary dwellings to healthier sites, yet he has not felt able to give full approval to such suggestions for the attempt to deal on a large scale with the irregular tenure of cottars and squatters as we have made (Ballantyne 1917: 446).

Matheson had also refused to help the District Committee by allowing new sites for houses to be built with Government funding after outbreaks of typhoid in two villages on the West Side. The Committee wanted to demolish the infected houses and build new ones but Matheson refused to help as 'some of the houses affected were tenanted by cottars and not by crofters' (Ballantyne 1921: 447). It should be noted that the Lewis estate was suffering financially by this time, 'as the excessive rates over a great part of the island swallow up practically the whole income' (Ballantyne 1917: 446). This was partly due to the cottars and squatters paying no rates at all, and also to the fact that crofters paid rates 'only on the agricultural value of their crofts', not on the value of their houses (ibid.: 446). It was also the estate's responsibility to pay for any legal proceedings taken against tenants, and this may have dissuaded the estate from taking legal action as a means to encourage housing improvements (Ballantyne 1921: 458).

One of the main barriers to improved housing, however, was the condition of the sites on which the houses were built. This was partly due to overcrowding, with many lots housing more than one family. By 1913 there were around 3100 crofters in Lewis and around 1200 cottars and squatters (Ballantyne 1921: 431). Seven hundred and nine of the lots contained two houses, one hundred and forty-nine had three houses on them, twenty one had four houses, seven had five houses, and one lot had six houses built on it (ibid.: 433). In reality, the land was even more overcrowded as, in some cases, more than one family lived in the same house rather than building another house illegally. Often a barn would be converted into a dwelling house (Ballantyne 1921: e.g. 325, 449; Hirst 2005: 34, 37, 40), and there were a number of cases where two or three houses were built together, with common walls and interconnecting doorways, so that they may still be classed as only 'one house' (Ballantyne 1921: 324). Interestingly, one witness confirmed that the people living on the lot with six houses on it were the wealthiest in the district (ibid.: 443). This was no doubt due to the fact that, as cottars and squatters, they had little land to tend to, paid no rent or rates, and earned a substantial living through the seasonal fishing industry.

In 1905, Dittmar and Millar noted that, in all of the townships surveyed, the area surrounding the houses was damp with water and manure.

> All the refuse is deposited in the byre and immediately in front of each house. The result is that the approach to every habitation is through a sea of mud, filth, and liquid manure, which soaks into the foundations of the houses while those standing at lower levels receive in addition the drainage from the upper ones. One sinks over the ankles in walking from one house to another, and a side slip would certainly mean over the boot-tops (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 7).

In Back, Dittmar and Millar found that '[o]utside the houses the ground is sodden with water and drainage from the byres, and is altogether in a most unsightly and insanitary state. The drainage channels in front of the houses are often choked' (Dittmar and Millar 1905: 5). The roadside drains were also in an unsatisfactory condition and were found to be in need of 'urgent attention on the part of the road authority' (ibid.: 5). Even in 1925, Stevens (1925: 82) noted in Barvas that '[t]he actual site of the house seems to have been determined mainly with a view to economy of the best land, and without regard to drainage or any other convenience. The houses are often surrounded with puddles or even marshes, and there is seldom any drainage of ground water.' Some of the houses I surveyed in Bragar, such as House 27(a), were surrounded by marshy ground.

In many townships, the best sites for building houses were on the common grazing land. However no tenant could legally build a house there without the consent of the whole township, or with the blessing of the proprietor, and usually neither was forthcoming. On the lots, the best land was often reserved for growing crops, leaving the worst land for the house:

> There is also the fact that the crofter frequently prefers to keep the best portion of the land for his crops and is willing to put his house in some damp hollow; while in very many cases he may be prevented from building on a healthy site, even although it is close at hand, by the impossibility of persuading all the crofters in the township to agree to a few yards being taken of the common grazing. In this way the "squatter," who does not wait to obtain such permission, usually has a better site for his house than the legitimate crofter (Ballantyne 1917: 439).

When houses were built back-to-back, there was often seepage of liquid manure from the byre of one house, to the living area of another (Dittmar and Millar 1905; Ballantyne 1921: 447). In Leurbost, Dittmar and Millar (1905: 10) described

watching a tenant who 'baled several buckets of liquid manure out of his byre which had come from the byre of the house above and, before reaching there, had percolated through his sleeping and living rooms'.

When questioned before the Ballantyne Commission, the District Sanitary Inspector was of the opinion that 'until the congestion in the townships is relieved sanitary administration is more or less a waste of time' because 'in a great many places the insanitary conditions are not due to drainage. The question arises when there are three families on one croft.' (Ballantyne 1921: 468). With conditions such as these, it was impossible to improve the existing house, or to build a decent new house on the same site, although the Commissioners found many instances of new houses having been built on unsuitable sites (ibid.: 457). Because of this, the Commission reported that '[t]he congested state and unsuitable sites of many of the crofters townships make it impossible to deal with the individual houses until the township has been treated as a whole' (Ballantyne 1917: 440).

It was also true, however, that many crofters were still reluctant to change, mainly because they believed the house to be necessary component of their agricultural practices, and partly due to a general lack of motivation to change:

> As we discovered in our inquiries, there is among the crofters an attachment to certain features of the "black house," arising from a belief in its supposed agricultural function. [...] In many cases where the young men would otherwise do away with these houses they have kept them for this purpose (Ballantyne 1917: 214).

The Ballantyne Commission concluded that the persistence of 'defective housing and insanitary conditions' (Ballantyne 1917: 219) was mainly due to

> the existence of a low level of public opinion and the adherence to practices which have a *raison d'être* but are prejudicial to the public health which constitute some of the greatest obstacles to progress (Ballantyne 1917: 219).

Of those crofters who did want a new house, many could not afford to build one (Ballantyne 1917: 211), and, as mentioned above, some crofters were put off from improving their existing house, partly because they believed state aid would eventually come to help them build a new one (ibid.: 440).

Discussing housing improvements in crofting areas the Ballantyne Commission concluded that while there had generally been a steady improvement in housing over the last generation:

> Bad – in certain areas wretchedly bad – housing survives in the more backward districts of the crofting areas, and it must be considered in connection with the general social conditions of the communities in which it is found. Thus there may be 'pockets' of bad housing in districts otherwise up to a fairly good level, but containing townships struggling to survive against adverse economic conditions, such as poor soil, failure of inshore fishing, or lack of road communication. In other cases, bad housing may be due to literal congestion caused by the excessive subdivision of crofts depressing the average prosperity of a township, and leading to the physical crowding of houses and byres in excessive proximity on badly chosen sites, and thus resulting in general insanitary conditions. This state of things obtains in certain Hebridean districts, especially in Lewis. Even where a township as such is not so placed, individual crofts may have bad houses, and such crofts may be too small and too much below the level of an economic holding to stand the burden of providing and maintaining a good house (Ballantyne 1917: 217-18).

7.2 The First World War and The Inter-War Years (1914-1939)

7.2.1 Society and Culture

This period in Lewis history saw many changes, not just in the housing of the people, but in their society and culture. Improved transport and communications and economic fluctuations were common throughout Britain, and indeed much of the western world, during this time. In Lewis, as elsewhere, people benefited from government aid of various types, such as the old age pension and unemployment benefit. Education also had an effect on the types of socio-cultural changes that were taking place during this time, as we shall see below. Social and cultural change in Lewis during the inter-war years was, in effect, about the assimilation of urban ideals into the hearts and minds of the Lewis people and thus into their society and culture. Some islanders, often the middle generation, left the island unwillingly to find work. Others, often the younger generation, chose to leave, preferring a more urbanised way of life, desirous of what the towns and cities had to offer. Many of those who stayed behind (particularly the younger generation) chose to introduce urban ideals into their island life as new forms of entertainment (such as the cinema) were introduced and houses were improved. In the 1930s, the tweed industry in Lewis

stemmed what could have been, and what was indeed prophesied to be, mass depopulation of the island.

7.2.1.1 The First World War

During the First World War, around 6700 men in Lewis (more than one fifth of the population) saw active service. In total, over a thousand of them lost their lives (Smout 1986: 75; Ferguson 2003: 153). At a township level, this meant that in some cases more than half of the male population served in the war in some capacity. In North Tolsta, for example, fifty-eight per cent of all males in the township enlisted in active service with more than one-fifth of them losing their lives (MacDonald 1984: 88). A number of island women also served their country during the war, working in munitions or jute factories on the mainland (MacDonald 1984: 93). As elsewhere, those left at home in Lewis spent the war waiting for news of their friends and family. The worst blow to the island, however, came after the war had ended, with the sinking of the *Iolaire* in the early morning of the 1st January 1919. The ship had been carrying ex-servicemen returning to Lewis, when it was grounded at the entrance to Stornoway harbour and began to go under. Of the 284 men on board, 205 lost their lives (Dòmhnallach 1978: 109). The high proportion of Lewis men in active service, and the high proportion of casualties, left few families in Lewis unaffected by the events of the First World War.

7.2.1.2 Leverhulme and The Struggle for Land

The period immediately after the end of the First World War was dominated not with the health issues of the pre-war period but with issues of land. The passing of the Small Landholders (Scotland) Act in 1911 (the Act which led to the demise of the Congested Districts Board and the creation, in its place, of the Board of Agriculture) had introduced 'compulsory powers in the creation of new holdings' (Day 1918: 227) which allowed the Board of Agriculture to authorise the formation of new holdings, with or without the consent of the proprietor:

> The 1911 Act transfers the powers of the Congested Districts Board to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland, but in addition, if the Commissioner for Small Holdings fails to come to terms with the landlord, he can apply to the Board who, after due notice and full inquiry, may intimate to the landlord that it

> is in the public interest that one or more new holdings should be constituted and thereupon apply to the Land Court to sanction the constitution of the new holdings in accordance with their scheme [...]. The Land Court then themselves conduct another inquiry and, if satisfied, make an order for the compulsory creation of new holdings and fix the rent (Day 1918: 227).

Prior to the First World War, the Board of Agriculture had proposed schemes to settle tenants on four Lewis farms but had encountered opposition from the proprietor. Duncan Matheson had previously allowed the farms of Aignish and Mangersta to be broken up by the Congested Districts Board, but was 'fundamentally opposed to land settlement' because of rent arrears and tenants' poor cultivation practices which exhausted the land (Leneman 1989: 117). Because of Matheson's opposition, the proposals were not carried out before the outbreak of war and the Board eventually applied to the Land Court for a decision. In September 1917 the schemes were approved, but at that time the island was already in the process of being sold to Lord Leverhulme (ibid.: 118). The deal was finally sealed in May 1918 when Leverhulme became the new proprietor of Lewis (Hutchinson 2003: 68).

The events that transpired in Lewis between 1918 and Leverhulme's death in 1925, have been well documented by other authors (e.g. MacDonald 1943: 133-59; Nicolson 1960; Leneman 1989: 116-131; MacDonald 1990: 178-86; Hutchinson 2003) and therefore a summary of events will suffice here.

Leverhulme's main interest in Lewis was in the development of the fishing industry, including the construction of a fish canning factory in Stornoway. He was not interested in crofting and opposed the Board of Agriculture's scheme to settle crofters on the four farms, threatening to cease work on his plans for the island if they carried out their proposals. The Board was therefore placed in an awkward position.

As Leverhulme's schemes, which included building new roads and new harbour facilities, and building new houses around Stornoway, provided employment for many islanders, the Board eventually decided in favour of Leverhulme, allowing him ten years to prove the worth of his schemes before any farms would be broken up (Hutchinson 2003: 202). Many of the tenants, however, had returned from the war looking forward to the promise of land, and were both dismayed and angry to find

the offer was being withdrawn (MacDonald 1943: 135, 139; Hutchinson 2003: 113-15). Leverhulme understood the tenants' plight and their desire for a 'legal' home, but he could not understand, and would not accept, their desire for their own piece of land. His attempt to remedy the situation, and to reach a compromise with the tenants, was to offer new houses, with attached allotments, to those tenants who wished to leave their crofts and move to Stornoway or the surrounding area, where they would earn a living in the fishing industry. Those tenants who did want land would then be relocated to the crofts left by those who had moved. His mistake, however, was in assuming that there were a significant number of tenants who 'were not happy on their crofts at present' and who would have been happy to resettle in Stornoway (Hutchinson 2003: 112):

> Crofters may have been found who would move temporarily to work and even to live in Stornoway. But very few crofters indeed would have relinquished for a fisherman's pay-packet and an urban allotment all their hard-won tenure on the family acreage and its connected home. For neither the first nor the last time Lord Leverhulme was making no attempt to perceive things as a Hebridean smallholder rather than as a southern industrialist. Projection into the minds of others had never been his strongest point. Asked to decide between a croft at the Butt of Lewis and a ready-made bungalow, garden and salary in Stornoway, he and every single one of his friends, his relatives and apparently his advisers would have fallen headfirst for the address on Matheson Road. Virtually every man and woman in rural Lewis would rather have chosen the security of tenure on the windswept plot of turf at Europie. That decision would certainly have been incomprehensible to him. His failure, his great, conclusive failure, was to refuse to recognise its validity (Hutchinson 2003: 113).

Leverhulme underestimated the close connection in the islanders' minds between house, home, and land. For Leverhulme, his home was the house he lived in; for the tenants of Lewis, their home was not only their house, but also the land it stood on, the land, in fact, from which it came.

In March 1919, raiding began on three farms on the east coast of Lewis with tenants marking out lots and beginning to prepare the land for cultivation (Hutchinson 2003: 117-18). Over the next year and a half, Leverhulme suspended his works a number of times as tenants, many of them disgruntled ex-servicemen, raided and took possession of various farms. This continued until October 1920, when the raiders were finally persuaded, after a visit from the Lord Advocate, to vacate the farms and to give Leverhulme's schemes a chance to prove their worth. Popular support for

Leverhulme had grown and it was hoped that, once his schemes resumed, a deal might soon be done between Leverhulme and the Board of Agriculture to break up more farms (MacDonald 1990: 178-86; Hutchinson 2003: 117, 165).

By the beginning of 1921, however, Leverhulme was in financial difficulties and, when his schemes resumed, they were on a much smaller scale than previously undertaken (MacDonald 1990: 184). Raiding began again in the early summer (Hutchinson 2003: 166) and, that September, Leverhulme announced that due to 'the conditions of supply and demand' in the fishing industry, the projects he had started in Lewis had become unviable (ibid.: 168). The next two years did not improve Leverhulme's fortunes. By the spring of 1922, the Board of Agriculture had purchased the farms of Coll, Gress, Tolsta, and Orinsay, creating one hundred and eighty new crofts and enlarging eighty-one existing crofts (ibid.: 168), as '[t]he Scottish Office had interpreted Leverhulme's suspension of his improvement program as the landowner defaulting on his gentleman's agreement to press on with job-creation in return for a ten-year holiday from croft-creation' (ibid.: 202).

In September 1923, Leverhulme finally decided to sever his connection with Lewis and to gift the island to the people (MacDonald 1990: 186; Hutchinson 2003: 199). Stornoway and some of the surrounding townships were taken in hand by the Town Council and governed by an appointed Trust (MacDonald 1990: 186; Hutchinson 2003: 206, 216). The crofters, however, almost unanimously refused the offer to own their own crofts, as to accept would have meant the loss of crofter status and the benefits it brought under the 1886 Crofters Act. As crofters, tenants paid one-eighth of the rates of a non-crofting landholder (Geddes 1955: 247), and an acceptance of Leverhulme's offer of land would have turned them from crofter-smallholders into owner-occupiers, eligible to pay the full rates. Leverhulme remained proprietor of the greater proportion of the island until his death in 1925 when it fell to his son, the second Viscount Leverhulme. Leverhulme's son had no interest in the Hebrides and in the years that followed, the island was sold off piece by piece (Hutchinson 2003: 225).[83] Geddes (1955: 244) comments that after Leverhulme's death, many squatters

[83] For information on who purchased the land and why, see Geddes (1955: 275-81).

were allowed to create new holdings for themselves on the common grazings, 'by common consent'.

7.2.1.3 The Economy

Of those who returned home safely after the First World War, many found employment, initially, as labourers in one or other of Lord Leverhulme's schemes. By the end of 1921, however, with Leverhulme's schemes at an end, only the fishing industry, itself in decline after the post-war boom, offered employment, however precarious, to large numbers of islanders. Young women still travelled to the seasonal herring fishing from many Lewis townships, while in other townships it became more common for young women to find employment on the mainland as domestic servants (Gibson 1946: 257).[84] It was not a prosperous time for the islanders, however, with paid employment hard to come by and, in 1923, around three hundred islanders, including eight from Bragar (CEATS(b) n.d.) left for Canada on board the *Metagama*, seeking a better way of life, and feeling that Lewis had little to offer them:

> I grew up during World War I. I was going to school in the early part of the War, but the emphasis was not on education but on the military and looking forward to the time when we would be eighteen and join up. The War ended before we came of age and there was no further need for the military. The Militia was discontinued and the Naval Reserve would not accept recruits for a long time. It was through those channels that most Lewismen went to the mainland for the first time and, after serving their time, they were in a better position to join the labour force. The post-war generation did not have this outlet. British industry had not yet recovered from the effect of the War, and any openings were reserved for the ex-servicemen. For us, emigration was inevitable. Canada was the first to open the door in a way we could afford. We had little choice (CEN n.d.).[85]

By the summer of 1924 over five hundred more had left on board the *Marloch* and the *Canada* (MacDonald 1990: 169). Many of them were young men and women who were not expected to return, thus dealing another blow for those who remained on the island as Ferguson (2003: 193) explains:

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[84] Murray (1973: 244) suggests that often those women who had worked on the mainland during the war chose domestic service rather than a return to the seasonal herring fishing.

[85] Throughout most of the inter-war period, the Royal Naval Reserve retainer offered a much-needed source of income and most families had at least one member who was a Royal Naval Reservist. As Smith (2001: 27) explains: 'The Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) was joined and accepted as an economic necessity.'

> It is hard to imagine the anguish of the old folk in those circumstances, for once they parted from their offspring, there was very little likelihood of their ever seeing them again. The emigrant ships, *Metagama*, *Canada* and *Marloch* carried away the youth of our communities. That was only five years after the end of the murderous First World War that had drawn its bloody scythe across our island and destroyed a generation.

In 1924, bad weather ruined crops and prevented the peat from drying and, in 1924-25, a Highlands and Islands Distress Fund was raised to help relieve the poverty. Although the poverty during these years was nowhere near as serious as during the famine periods of the nineteenth century, the lack of employment, coupled with the rise in transport charges for goods and passengers (which had risen threefold since the war), and a few bad seasons, encouraged even more people to move to the mainland or abroad to find work (Geddes 1955: 281-82). The population of Lewis dropped considerably between 1921 and 1931, from 28,245 to 25,079, i.e. by just over eleven per cent (Darling 1955: 81). In the parish of Barvas, the population dropped from 6,660 to 5,876 – almost twelve percent. Similar drops in population were to be found in the other four parishes (ibid.: 81).[86]

In the 1930s, however, in the wake of the Great Depression, some of those who had left the island returned to Lewis, being unable to secure work elsewhere. At home, the fishing industry suffered as markets on the mainland and abroad either closed or declined and many islanders found themselves out of work (Murray 1973: 45). By this time, both men and women were eligible to receive unemployment benefit, with the women who had lost their jobs as gutters and packers receiving benefit during the fishing season only (Geddes 1955: 287). By 1932, there were around 750 men registered as unemployed in Lewis (ibid.: 286). Geddes explains:

> After a couple of months of wage labour at road-mending, harbour-repair, or the like, young men were qualified for 'the dole'. Furnished with this, they returned to the croft when paid employment gave out, to cart in their peat, collect stones for a new house or saunter out with a rod for a little fishing from the rocks. All this was done 'on the dole' with complete legality, so long as their names were duly inscribed at Stornoway Labour Exchange as seeking fresh employment (Geddes 1955: 285).

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[86] It should be noted that the population statistics for 1921 were taken in June, when seasonal visitors may have added to the resident population in certain areas (Darling 1955: 83). It is unlikely, however, that the figures for Lewis would have been overly affected, particularly the areas outside Stornoway.

According to Geddes (1955: 285), '[n]ot a few prayed that "employment" would not come inconveniently soon, as they would then be legally bound to accept it and to leave the croft'. Part of the problem was that paid work more often than not meant moving to the mainland. This, in turn, meant that a substantial proportion of the tenant's newfound income would have to be expended on accommodation and food, and often the tenant was still supporting, at least in part, family back home on the croft. This was the case throughout the rural Highlands and Islands. In their *Review* of 1938, the Scottish Economic Committee found that, in crofting areas, some young and middle-aged men and women became 'tied to the croft by the tradition of maintaining the family interest in it or of preserving a home for the old people' (Hilleary 1938: 71). Although they might gain suitable employment on the mainland, this would involve subsistence costs which would be over and above the cost of keeping on the croft – 'Acceptance of such work means that the recipients are actually worse off than if they had refused it' (ibid.: 71):

> Summed up, the position is that in crofting communities there is little regular employment outside crofting and fishing, that the land – whatever the potentialities of well-organised and well-conducted crofting – does not at present support the people at modern levels of comfort and that although the aids available from the State help towards the provision of a higher standard of living than would otherwise be possible, the situation has nevertheless a demoralising effect, and particularly on the younger generation (Hilleary 1938: 72).

Geddes (1955: 285) also notes the negative effect this had on some young men who 'began to lose independence and self-respect', particularly before the 'Means Test' was introduced, towards the end of 1931, which determined the level of benefit to which each person was entitled, and led, in general, to a reduction in the amount of benefit provided in the islands (ibid.: 286). This reduction in unemployment benefit would have encouraged more islanders to take up what work was available, even if it meant leaving the croft.

The role of the croft in island life was also changing. The increase in imported food and clothing that had begun in the mid-nineteenth century continued throughout the early twentieth century, and this was accompanied by a change in the pattern of agriculture. The amount of arable land under cultivation began to decline (DoA 1949: 1; Lewis Association 1952: 26). Less potatoes began to be grown, and less

barley. In 1921 the acreage under barley in Lewis and Harris was 2858¼; this had fallen to 682¾ by 1939. Likewise, the acreage under potatoes fell from 3706¾ to 2415¾ over the same period. The acreage of oats, however, rose from 4394 to 7759 during this period, along with an increase in the acreage of mixed corn, both of which were used as fodder (Darling 1955: 204, 259-61). These changes reflected a change in the diet of the people, who were eating less potatoes and barley bread, and more imported foods. Also, although the western Highlands and Islands saw a general decline in the numbers of cattle during this period, this was less marked in the Hebrides than elsewhere.[87] Dairy cattle were still being kept in rural Lewis to provide the family with milk and, in addition, cattle were being sold to make money. The total number of cattle in Lewis and Harris fell from 13,706 in 1921, to 11,057 in 1931, and to 9060 in 1939 (Darling 1955: 266-67). The decline in cattle was more than matched by the increase in sheep from 71,992 in 1921, to 88,994 in 1931, and to 114,429 in 1939 (ibid.: 268). The corresponding cattle-to-sheep ratio therefore diminished from 1:5 in 1921, to 1:13 by 1939 (ibid.: 269).

Many crofts began to be worked to provide money rather than to provide a subsistence, while others began to be regarded simply as homes (Hilleary 1938: 75). As more reliance was put on imported goods, a cash income became a necessity. Collier (1953: 63) notes that the average income of a Lewis crofter in 1939 was three or four times that of 1906. The result was that '[a]s a money economy took hold, both families and townships became less self-sufficient, more fully integrated with the world outside. More trips were made to other places. More and more items were imported' (Hunter 1991: 29).

When the Depression hit in the early 1930s many families found themselves in financial trouble. Amongst them were those tenants who had been settled on reclaimed farm-land by the Board of Agriculture. In some cases, the Board had been obliged to buy the sheep stock of the farmer whose land they were buying and, to

[87] Fewer cattle were being kept throughout the Highlands and Islands by the late 1930s, not only because of the increase in imported meat and the high cost of transportation (which meant lower returns for crofters), but also because of 'the general decline in arable farming and consequent reduction of winter keep'. It was also difficult for islanders to obtain fertilizers at a reasonable price (Hilleary 1938: 80).

recoup some of their losses, they in turn 'obliged' the incoming tenants to buy the sheep from them. Many of these tenants had little knowledge of sheep farming and had only been able to purchase the stock with the aid of a loan from the Board of Agriculture. When the Depression hit, many of them had problems repaying their loans (Hilleary 1938: 81; Hunter 1991: 35-36).

By the early 1930s, however, the Harris Tweed industry had begun to pick up in Lewis. The industry seems to have had its beginnings in Lewis in the early 1880s after the death of James Matheson and the subsequent failure to maintain the expenditure on the estate. Coupled with the fall in income to be gained from the fishing industry, some islanders began weaving (Thompson 1968: 119). However it was not until the 1920s and 1930s that weaving in rural areas really took off. Despite his lack of success with the fishing industry in Lewis, Leverhulme does seem to have contributed to the growth of the tweed industry around this time, not least by encouraging the use of the semi-automatic Hattersley loom which allowed for faster weaving and more complicated patterns (Hunter 2001: 89).[88] Leverhulme, in fact, took quite an interest in the tweed industry and was involved, amongst other things, in buying out and opening new carding and spinning mills (Thompson 1968: 93-95). Many of those tenants who had a little money put away, perhaps from their unemployment benefit, bought a loom. Others managed to get work either in the carding and spinning mills, or in one of the newly established spinning 'sheds', which held between four and six looms each (Hunter 2001: 90). It was a job that was completely compatible with the croft work, unlike fishing, and became an extremely popular occupation in many townships:

> Thoisich mi fhìn a' fighe ann an 1936 no 1937, sann mun am sin a thoisich tòrr dhaoine a' fighe. Se beartan fiodh a bh' ann an uairsin agus bhathas gan obrachadh le do làmhan is le do chasan. Bhiodh a' cuid bu mhotha de dhaoine a' ceannachd nam beartan, ach bha duine no dithis a dhèanadh iad iad fhèin. Is docha gum faigheadh tu tè ri cheannachd nam biodh bodach air choireigin a' dol a sguir dheth (CEATS, Folder SC).
>
> I started weaving in 1936 or 1937, and it was around then that a lot of people started weaving. It was wooden looms in those days, that you worked with your hands and your feet. Most people bought their looms but one or two would

[88] The semi-automatic loom was originally introduced for the use of ex-servicemen who had lost a hand in the war. It was operated by the feet, with the shuttle moving across the web automatically (Hunter 2001: 89). This type of loom is still in use in the island today.

> make them themselves. You might be able to buy one if you knew someone else that was about to stop (this author's translation).

In Lewis, weaving was predominately a male occupation, whereas in Harris it was more often women who became weavers (Thompson 1968: 88).[89] The increase in sheep during the 1920s and 1930s seems to have been largely due to the rise in tweed production during this time and the demand for wool (Lewis Association 1952: 23).

7.2.1.4 Transport and Communications

Weaving also had a positive effect on the local transport network within the island as yarn had to be taken to the weaver, and the finished cloth collected. Workers also had to be transported to and from the two Stornoway carding and spinning mills (Thompson 1968: 81). Transportation within the island improved substantially during the inter-war years. In 1932, a daily bus service was introduced to take tourists around the island and this expanded into a local bus service for islanders throughout the 1930s. Roads were improved to withstand the introduction of motorised transport (by 1925 there were around two hundred and fifty vehicles on the island), and bicycles also became more common (Thompson 1968: 80-81).

The influx of tourists was supported by improved transport to and from the island as sea-links were improved and 1934 saw the first commercial flight taking passengers between Inverness and Stornoway (Thompson 1968: 69-70, 77).[90] The postal service also improved between 1918 and 1939, with the introduction of second-hand Ford vans around 1926 (ibid.: 82; Geddes 1955: 283). Prior to that the mail had been delivered using horses and, in later years, Albion coaches from Glasgow (Thompson 1968: 82). These various developments made it much easier for tenants in rural Lewis, to travel to Stornoway, and thus to the mainland (Geddes 1955: 283).

Improvements in telecommunications also meant that the islanders were in greater contact with the rest of the world, particularly after the introduction of the radio,

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[89] According to Thompson (1968: 88-89), when war broke out in 1914, many women in Lewis took over the men's role as weavers which in turn led to the decline in hand-spinning as the women were too busy weaving to spin their own yarn.

[90] Despite the increase in the number of island visitors, however, tourism in Lewis in the 1930s was 'a perfunctory and casual affair' (Thompson 1968: 129), and remained so until the introduction of MacBrayne's drive-on/drive-off ferries in the 1960s (ibid.: 70).

shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War (Thompson 1968: 84). The Stornoway Gazette, Lewis' weekly newspaper, was introduced in January 1917 (Hutchinson 2003: 65) and, as communications improved, mainland newspapers would have become more accessible. A new telephone service to the mainland was introduced in March 1933 (Thompson 1968: 84) with seven telephones between Shawbost and the Butt of Ness (CEATS(c) n.d.). Cinema was introduced to Stornoway in the early twentieth century with the Picture House in Keith Street and, in 1934, the Playhouse opened. While it was still a long journey from the rural areas into Stornoway, the daily bus service made the trip much easier. Smout (1986: 175-76) comments that the introduction of cinema to the island is said to have contributed to the decline of the courting practice of bundling, 'since it was more private and more fun at the flicks'.

Such changes in transport and communications saw the increased assimilation of the islanders into the British urban way of life. The increase in disposable income, whether it be from the tweed industry or from unemployment benefit,[91] and improved transport and communications, facilitated more frequent travel, and news and goods from the mainland became more accessible:

> The merchants' vans which, by the 1930s, called daily or weekly in most crofting townships supplied their customers with products that were, for the most part, indistinguishable from those on sale in any industrial centre. What the van, or the local shop, could not supply was bought by crofting housewives from mail order catalogues – those produced by Welsh firms like J. D. Williams were among the favourites – of a kind that were increasingly familiar throughout the United Kingdom.
>
> The crofter of the 1930s smoked the same cigarettes, wore the same dungarees, read the same newspaper – usually the Daily Express – as millions of people in the south. He listened, on his newly acquired wireless set, to the same BBC programmes.
>
> (Hunter 1991: 30)

7.2.1.5 Education and Religion

Education continued to have an effect on the social and cultural development of the island during the inter-war period, with pupils being educated either for a military

[91] Even after the introduction of the Means Test, tenants were still on the receiving end of a cash income.

career or for paid employment, which usually meant leaving the island (Smout 1986: 83). Not least in this movement, was the fact that most people on the island now not only spoke English, but were familiar with the urban way of life having either travelled themselves, or having friends or relatives who had travelled. According to MacDonald (1943: 53), it was 'unreasonable to expect educated young people to stay contented and happy in an unremunerative calling while bigger prizes are offered elsewhere'.

The combination of a modern education, improved transport and communications (in particular the introduction of radio and cinema), and government aid which effectively removed poverty on the scale of that seen in the mid- and late nineteenth century, resulted in a general desire amongst the people for social advancement:

> The crofter's outlook and viewpoint have altered since 1883 and, as a result, the essential characteristics of a croft have changed. Education, higher standards of living and of health, contact with industrial activity and with town life, have brought with them the natural desire of the rising generation to share in the general social advance (Hilleary 1938: 75).

The influence of the Church over the people also began to slowly decline, and gradually enabled such social changes to become possible. On one hand, the younger generation felt more able to stand their ground against the Church, for example by holding regular dances in the evenings on local bridges and at crossroads, against the wishes of the local minister (CEATS, Folder SC).[92] On the other hand, however, the influence of the Church on the older generation was still strong enough that, for example, the introduction of village halls, where local social events such as dances could be held, was effectively opposed by the Church (Hunter 1991: 62-63). The result was that the younger generation felt even less inclined to stay in Lewis, and were now well equipped, socially and culturally, to leave the island and find work elsewhere (Hunter 1991: 62-63):

> Rural depopulation therefore occurred when the young, in particular, felt their need to associate could only be met by going to town. For them, the rural 'community' had ceased to be a community they cared about.

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[92] These 'open-air' dances were called '*danns an rothaid*' (road dance). The Bragar and Shawbost '*danns*' was at the crossroads at Brunal, or, if it was a joint '*danns*' with Arnol, at the bridge halfway between Bragar and Arnol (CEATS, Folder SC).

> This process was probably long drawn-out, and associated with the rise of a homogeneous popular culture. Among the factors leading to such homogeneity, the spread of compulsory schooling after 1872, with its concomitant of government inspection and uniform examination system, was very important. The board schools were explicitly intended to equip rural children for life outside and to give them the appropriate linguistic skills to cope away from their own district. [...] seventy years of uniform education, combined everywhere with better physical communications, tended by osmosis to produce a uniform culture in which the ways of the town were given a higher value than those of the countryside. At the same time, the cultural influence of the churches as centres of local life gradually diminished, while after the First World War the influence of the radio and cinema rose in prestige to portray a metropolitan and essentially big-city culture. In these terms, therefore, certainly in the twentieth century, rural depopulation represents the final victory, in the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people, of the town over the country.
>
> (Smout 1986: 83)

7.2.2 Housing

The period from 1918 to 1939 saw many changes in Lewis housing with existing houses being improved, and new houses being built. Such improvements to the housing stock were taking place throughout Britain at this time, as the need for low-cost working-class housing was realised, and minimum standards for acceptable housing were being set. In 1918, the Tudor Walters Report became 'the first comprehensive treatise on the political, technical and practical issues involved in the design of the small house' (Nuttgens 1989: 51) and it was followed swiftly by the Town Planning Act (The Addison Act) of 1919 which required local authorities throughout Britain to take responsibility for the improvement of the housing stock in their area and to build new houses where necessary (Nuttgens 1989: 53).[93]

7.2.2.1 New Houses

In 1917, the *Report on the Housing of the Industrial Population* had recommended that the Board of Agriculture should take a more pro-active role in the improvement of crofter housing in the Outer Hebrides. Whereas, up until that point, it had been their practice 'to wait for crofters to take the first step in applying for loans to rebuild or improve their houses', the Commission believed that the Board should,

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[93] For more information on the effects of the Tudor Walters Report see Nuttgens (1989: 50-66).

> in co-operation with the Local Authorities and the Local Government Board, take the initiative in this matter and regard it as a continuation of their work of relieving congestion [...] We think that a sum of £30,000 per annum for ten years should be set aside and placed at the disposal of the Board for rehousing in the Outer Hebrides (Ballantyne 1917: 220).

This recommendation was adopted, in part, through the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act of 1919, which allowed for the annual payment of £15,000 into the Agriculture (Scotland) Fund, for a period of ten years. This, when added to the existing budget of £15,000, took the annual amount available to the £30,000 recommended by the Commission. Assistance was therefore to be provided through loans 'for the rebuilding and improvement of houses and other buildings', and also through 'the provision of facilities to crofters for the purchase of building materials at prices excluding the cost of freight' (BoA 1929: 19). The Act also allowed the Board to order the creation of new holdings without having to go through the Land Court (Hilleary 1938: 20). Between 1st January 1920 and 31st December 1928, £53,075 was awarded to tenants in Lewis, by way of 381 loans. This provided for the erection of 238 new houses, the improvement of 163 houses, and the improvement and erection of twenty-six steadings. The amount of money loaned to Lewis tenants was greater than the amount loaned in any other crofting district, and almost double the amount loaned to Skye tenants, who received the second highest amount of loan money (£27,012) during this period (BoA 1929: 91).

The Board issued standard house-plans, 'some with two storeys and the well-known dormer windows, and the others of houses with one-storey with three rooms and scullery' (BoA 1929: 20).[94] Most of the houses built were of the latter type, and 'almost all of them were built with stone and lime walls and roof of asbestos slates' (ibid.: 20-21). Concrete was also used, with moulds for blocks being made on site, from timber which would then be used to form the roof (ibid.: 21). New houses were generally built by 'one fairly skilled workman usually directing the householder and friends as amateur builders' (Geddes 1955: 85).

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[94] The production of local authority housing plans was taking place throughout Britain at this time after Addison (President of the Local Government Board) commissioned housing plans from various architectural firms, in order to help local authorities in the production of their own housing plans (Nuttgens 1989: 53).

In the Hebrides, the loan usually took the form 'partly of an advance of such materials as have to be imported and partly of cash to pay for the labour of mason, joiner and slater' (BoA 1929: 21). Due to the particular circumstances in Lewis, where congestion was still high, and crofts very small, certain rules were adopted with regard to loans on the island. First of all, loans were not given to people 'on whose croft land there are cottar houses' (ibid.: 21), which would therefore have ruled out a large number of tenants. Secondly, loans over £200 were not made, as many of those who had taken out loans in Lewis were in arrears. With regard to cottars, the Board continued to create new holdings where possible and then to give loans to cottars for the construction of new houses (ibid.: 21).

In order to facilitate the distribution of building materials, the Board opened up local stores where materials could be housed. The Board covered the cost of transportation, and sold the materials to crofters either as an advance of the loan, or for cash at almost wholesale price (BoA 1929: 21). A store at Carloway was opened in 1928. Other stores in Lewis at that time were to be found in Ness, Stornoway, and Uig (ibid.: 18).

By the end of 1928, the Board of Agriculture could report that

> [t]he housing conditions of the Western Highlands and islands present to-day a marked contrast to those of twenty years ago. The standard of housing has risen; the demand for better living conditions has made itself felt, and has been satisfied in many cases through the assistance of these loans. Nevertheless the position in too many districts is still unsatisfactory; the 'black house' is not yet uncommon, and much remains to be done to make the accommodation for a Highland crofter and his family meet the reasonable requirements of health and comfort (BoA 1929: 22).

New houses continued to be built, using loans and subsidies until the start of the Second World War. However, the number of loans to Lewis tenants provided by the Board during the inter-war period – 1200 loans in Lewis and Harris between 1920 and 1940 (Hance 1951: 85) – represented the improvement of only a small proportion of the island's housing stock.

Not all new houses were built with aid from the Board of Agriculture, however, not all were of stone and lime or of concrete construction, and not all followed the Board of Agriculture's plans. Some tenants may have not taken out a loan for their new house because they could not afford the repayments. Others, for example the cottars and squatters, would not have been eligible for loans. Still others may not have wanted the constraints of building to the Board of Agriculture's specifications. By the 1930s, however, according to Ferguson (2003: 227), 'most families who had an income, however meagre, tried their best to improve their housing conditions', and this led to many people, who could not afford to employ someone to help them build a house, trying their hand at building new houses themselves.

Corrugated iron became a common building material in some parts of the island during this period, for both walls and roofs.[95] Ferguson (2003: 192, 227-29) describes a corrugated iron 'shed' being built as a temporary house after the First World War, and a permanent corrugated iron house which was erected by his father in the 1930s. His father's house was built with concrete gables with a chimney in each end, side walls and roof of corrugated iron, and a concrete floor. The house contained three rooms – a living room and two bedrooms, and also had a concrete walled porch. Ferguson (2003: 227) also describes a badly constructed timber house that was built in Point in the 1930s, which had no gables and 'a broad metal pipe placed over a wood stove to act as a chimney'. The appearance of wooden houses is confirmed by MacKenzie (1917: 429)[96] and also Geddes (1955: 84) who explains that '[t]he availability for the first time of planks and timber, a certain practice in boat-repairing, and possibly acquaintance at first- or second-hand with Canadian wooden houses, may have influenced the choice of wood.'

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[95] Informants have told me that corrugated iron was not generally used as a building material in Bragar. It was sometimes used to roof the old house after tenants had moved into a new house and were using the old house as a byre or store (Inf. A). It appears that corrugated iron as a walling material was more common on the east coast of the island, for example in Lochs and in Point (Inf. H; Ferguson 2003; cf. Hirst 2005).

[96] Although timber houses are mentioned in this 1917 publication, and were proably being built prior to the First World War, I have found more published sources for timber houses during the inter-war period than in the pre-war period.

As with the pre-war houses, not all of the new houses built after the war were satisfactory, and they did not compare favourably to the old houses when it came to protection from the weather. Gibson mentions that in a gale of 1921 which hit the Western Isles 'hardly a White House escaped some form of damage, but the Black Houses were practically unaffected' (Gibson 1925: 209).

7.2.2.2 Improvements to Vernacular Houses

Despite the growing desire for new houses, improvements were also being made to the old houses during this time. After the First World War, wallpaper became more common, both on walls and on ceilings, as Ferguson (2003: 253-54) describes:

> After the Great War, wallpapers came into vogue and girls who had experience of being *air mhuinntireas* [in domestic service] in the grand houses of the cities, came back home, determined to replace the sooty ceilings of the black-houses with bright, patterned wallpaper. Within a few years, wallpapered half ceilings became all the rage.

Some houses, however, did not put up wallpaper (CEATS, Folder SC; Inf. J), while in others it was common for sacks to be sewn together and hung on the walls:

> Tha cuimhne agam a' chiad sgeadachadh a chaidh a dhèanamh air na taighean dubha. Bha iad ri fuaghal pocannan ri chèile agus gan cuir an àrda ris na ballachan air maidean a bha air am bruthadh a steach eadar na clachan, agus bha iad an uairsin ri cuir seòrsa de pheant geal orr' (CEATS, Folder Bràgair).
>
> I remember the first time the black house was 'done up'. They would sew sacks together and put them up on the walls on bits of wood sticking out from between the stones. They then put some sort of white paint on them (this author's translation).

The 'white paint' was presumably 'whiting', which the young women would buy in Woolworths during the summer herring fishing. It came as a white powder, to which water would be added to form a paste, and was latterly put around the hearth to make it look neat (various informants including Inf. J, Inf. N; Hirst 2005: 147).

During the inter-war years, most houses introduced a timber or stone partition between the byre and the living area, and many re-built the end wall at the upper end of the house to include a gable with a built-in chimney in the sleeping area (see Figure 34). Windows also became more common. Although both oral and physical evidence suggests that neither windows nor gable chimneys were particularly common in Bragar, a number of houses do have them (Inf. B).

Figure 34: Gable-end chimney in house in Tolsta Chaolais, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

By far the most important change in housing to occur during this inter-war period, however, was the development of the hearth. By 1925, some houses had opened up a hole in the roof above the fire, into which some sort of funnel was sometimes inserted, to help draw out the smoke (Stevens 1925: 85). This was often just a small wooden barrel or a small zinc pail, with the bottom taken out. From this point onwards, the development of the hearth in Lewis, and throughout the Hebrides, is a complex one, and one that requires further consideration. The diversity in living conditions apparent during the pre-war years in Lewis continued throughout the inter-war years and this was reflected in the way the hearth developed in the island, with a variety of hearth types becoming prevalent throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The sequence of development is therefore somewhat difficult to determine. However, from published sources dating from this period and from present-day oral

and physical evidence, it is possible to build up some sort of picture of the development of the hearth in Lewis during this time.

The central hearth began to be replaced by a hearth set against, or set into, a stone partition wall, known as the *tallan*, between the byre and the living area, probably sometime in the 1910s or 1920s.[97] In 1934, in Balallan, in the parish of Lochs, Swedish scholars Kjellberg and Hasslöf found a stone partition wall between the byre and the living area, against which stood the hearth. The hearth had a backstone set against the wall, and had low stone walls built up on either side of it 'on which a gridiron was placed' (Fenton 1998: 282). Above the fire, was 'a wooden hood [...] ending in a square (wooden) chimney pot' (ibid.: 282). This hood was likely similar to the *hingin' lum*, or 'hanging chimney', which was prevalent throughout the Scottish mainland in the early twentieth century (Fenton 1981). In a house in Harris, Kjellberg and Hasslöf found a similar situation, with the hood this time constructed of 'sailcloth, which opened out to the wooden chimney pot' (Fenton 1998: 283). Formerly, they were told, 'the same kind of canvas-hood even had been used over the fire on the floor', in other words, over the central hearth (ibid.: 283). In Barvas, by 1934, they found that only one of around twenty houses retained the central hearth. The rest had fireplaces built *into* a stone partition wall separating the byre from the living area (ibid.: 286), rather than the hearth sitting *against* the wall, as they had found in Balallan. At the time of their visit, they found 'all were busy pulling down the old straw from the roofs and thatching them with new. The old straw, especially that over the kitchen, which was mingled with soot from the peat-smoke, was considered as a good fertilizer' (ibid.: 286). They make no mention of a chimney hood and the fact that tenants were still using the thatch as fertilizer suggests that the smoke was not taken out of the house completely.

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[97] Ferguson (2003: 254) suggests that the hearth moved after the First World War, at least in the Point district. Neither Stevens (1925) nor Gibson (1925) mention the new hearth position although given the great variety of housing conditions to be found in Lewis, and the tendency of some authors to find the past more interesting than the present, this may be misleading. Smith (2001: 7), describing his childhood home, where he lived until around 1920, writes that the fireplace and chimney were in the middle of the stone partition wall separating the byre from the living area.

Once the hearth was moved, therefore, it was either set against a stone partition wall between the byre and the living area, or built into a stone partition wall. It seems that, on the West Side of Lewis, the hearth was generally built into the wall, but the new hearth was not constructed as an enclosed chimney, like the hearth in the gable wall of the sleeping area. Instead, an open flue was constructed, as is shown in Figure 35 and Figure 36. In Bragar, as elsewhere in Lewis, this was called 'the hobble'. There seems to be no Gaelic equivalent, and I was told that the name stems from a type of narrow skirt, called a 'hobble skirt', which was popular with the ladies in the 1910s (Inf. L; *COED* 1999: 675), and this suggests that its inception was perhaps in the 1910s or early 1920s. The hobble wall, or *tallan*, was originally around wall height, or slightly higher, so that rather than taking the smoke out of the house, it gently guided it up into the roof space which would have allowed for the use of the thatch for fertilizer, as was still the practice, at least in Barvas, in 1934. It might also have been thought that the open flue would have kept more heat in the house.

Figure 35: Hobble in house in Borghastan, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

Figure 36: Hobble in house in Tolsta Chaolais, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

Some informants have told me, however, that they remember a wooden canopy, like the one described by Kjellberg and Hasslöf, hanging over the fire in some houses (e.g. Inf. H, Inf. J). Both Ferguson (2003: 37) and MacLeod (Hirst 2005: 31, 63, 65) seem to suggest that it may have been this wooden canopy which was originally called 'the hobble'.[98] Other informants have told me that a sheet of zinc was attached to the front of the hobble, thus enclosing it to some extent (Inf. P, Inf. D), and one informant mentioned that the hobble in his grandfather's house had been built as an open flue, although with a lintel across it, and that it had later been enclosed not with zinc but with timber (Inf. A). In some houses (e.g. houses 24 and 25), at some point,

[98] There is also the possibility that canopies made of sailcloth were, at one time, more common, and that it was these, with their skirt-like material and shape, that gave rise to the name 'hobble'.

if not originally, the hobble was built up with stone to form an enclosed chimney flue which eventually extended through the roof (see Figure 37). Two informants also mentioned houses which had a double-sided hobble as a partition between the living area and the sleeping area which kept both rooms warm and removed the need for a separate chimney in the sleeping area (Inf. A, Inf. J).

Figure 37: Enclosed chimney flue in partition wall, house 24, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

Whether the open hobble came first, and the wooden hood and zinc panel were later developments, is impossible to say, however, it seems likely that the enclosed stone chimney, in this position in the house, was a later development.[99]

[99] It may be that the open flue was regarded as more practical when it came to cooking as it would have been easier, perhaps, to handle cooking implements with an open flue, similar to the open central hearth. The open flue may therefore have been a transition phase between the central hearth and the enclosed chimney, although in some houses the central hearth or the open flue was retained.

Even once the hobble had been enclosed, however, the smoke was not always taken out through the roof. Oral evidence collected by Dr. Finlay MacLeod (pers. comm.), coupled with existing physical evidence, shows that, in some houses, the top of the enclosed flue was blocked up and a small window opened in the back of the hobble, which would allow the smoke to escape into the byre end of the house (see Figure 38 and Figure 39). While this may have been to give the cattle and the hens in the byre more heat, it would also have allowed the thatch at the byre end of the house to become saturated with soot, so that it could be used as fertilizer. Campbell seems to make reference to this practice in his notes from a field trip to the Hebrides in 1948. He was told, by an informant from Harris, that '[i]n certain parts of Lewis in houses where the people and cattle are under one roof there is a hole behind the fire into the part of the house where the cattle are. The ashes are put through this hole for the purpose of keeping the cattle warm. The hens are also kept warm by the same ashes and lay well' (Walker 1989a: 58).

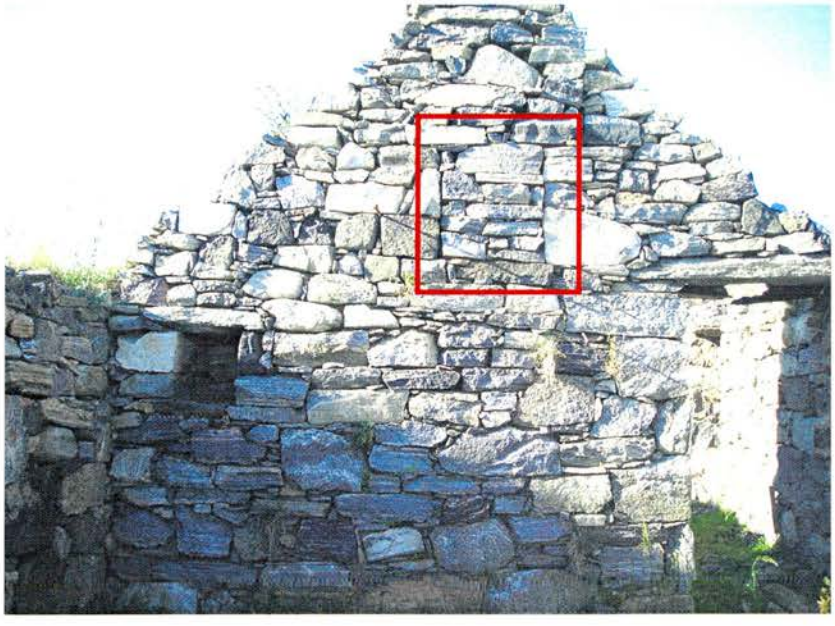


Figure 38: Window in the back of an enclosed chimney flue, Dalbeg, Lewis.[100]
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

[100] Note also the shelf in the byre side of the partition wall. The purpose of this shelf is unclear, however it may have provided space to place a lamp.

Figure 39: Window in the back of an enclosed chimney flue, Dalbeg, Lewis.
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

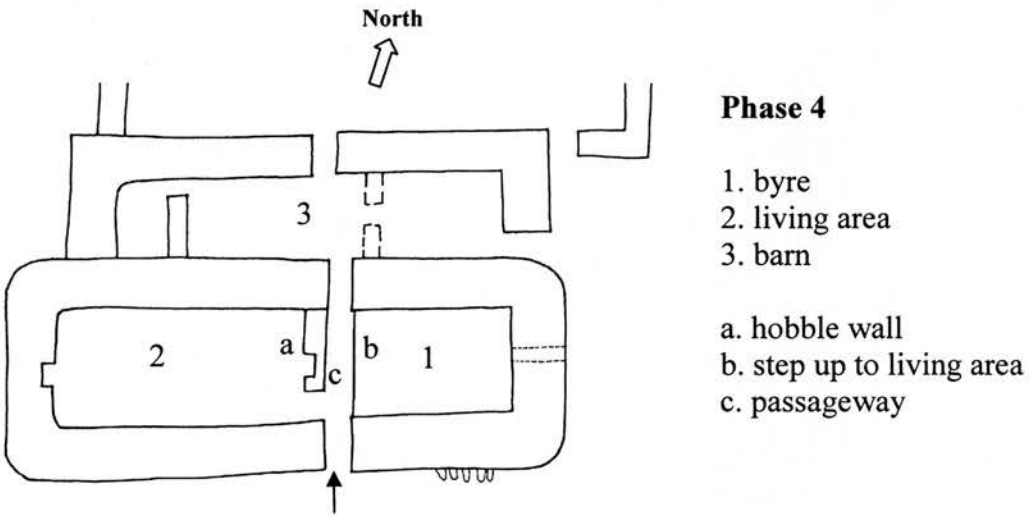
Despite these developments, however, the central hearth was still to be found in houses throughout the island in the late 1930s (Gibson 1946: 260), in the 1950s (Inf. A), and even in the 1960s (Fenton 1995), as will be shown in Section 7.3.2.3.

A number of other housing improvements took place during the inter-war years. In some houses, the hobble was constructed with a small shelf built into it, where the Bible and often a clock were kept (Inf. A), other houses contained shelves in one of the long-walls of the living area (see Figure 40 and Figure 41). These were presumably original features dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and are also fairly common in partition walls containing enclosed chimneys (e.g. Figure 37 above).

Figure 40: Hobble with shelf, Arnol, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

Figure 41: House with hobble and shelving in side-wall, Tolsta Chaolais, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

In most houses, the hobble wall, or *tallan*, was built not on the edge of the step between the byre and the living area, but around one metre into the living area. This then created a passageway between the byre and the living area, with the entrance door into the byre-dwelling, and the door through into the barn at either end of the passageway (see Plan 18). This was particularly the case where a timber partition was erected at the edge of the step, to further separate this area from the byre. The area thus created behind the hobble wall, *cùl an tallain* (the back of the *tallan*) was often used to store peat, water, and other household items. In houses which do not contain a *fosglan*, this passageway may be seen as an internalised form of *fosglan*.



Plan 18: House 25, South Bragar (1:250), showing hobble wall and passageway between the living area and the byre

Roofing materials changed during this period, particularly as the popularity of tarred felt grew, and many thatched houses, such as house 26(a), began to have a layer of felt under the thatch to make the roof more waterproof (Inf. D). The straw or heather ropes which held down the thatch in the early nineteenth century houses were replaced, first of all by coir rope, which was named *Sìoman Theàrlaich* (Charlie's Rope) after the Stornoway merchant who first imported it in the 1920s (MacDonald 1990: 53), and later by old fishing-nets and chicken wire (see Figure 42).[101] In houses where there was a loom, this was generally kept either in the barn, or in the space behind the hobble, between the living area and the byre, '*cùl an tallain*' (behind

[101] Chicken wire was in use for this purpose, in South Uist at least, by 1934 (Fenton 1998: 278-79).

the partition). In some houses a separate '*taigh-beirt*' (weaving shed) was built, such as on lot 7/8 in South Bragar, shown in Figure 43 (Inf. B; CEATS, Folder SC).

Figure 42: Fishing net securing the thatch, Borgh, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

In addition, it was common, during the inter-war years, for houses to change on a fairly regular basis, with doorways being created or blocked up, rooms being shortened or lengthened, and extra rooms being built or removed, to suit each family's needs (Inf. A). As one informant put it (Inf. L), '*cha robh ann ach atharrachadh*' ('there was nothing but change').

Figure 43: Weaving shed on lot 7/8, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2002)

7.2.3 Housing Change: Process and Motivations

The housing changes that took place during the inter-war years were therefore made financially possible in a number of ways. The increase in ready money, particularly during the 1930s once the tweed industry had taken off in Lewis, would have allowed those islanders who wanted to improve their living conditions greater flexibility. According to Geddes (1955: 303), house-building was 'at its height' during the early 1930s, as the men were home from war and many of those who had emigrated had returned. Because many men found themselves wholly or partially unemployed, they turned their hand to improvements in the home and on the croft (ibid.: 287). The introduction of a substantial Board of Agriculture Loan, coupled with the influx of new materials at an affordable price, would, to some extent, have encouraged the construction of new houses over the improvement of old houses. The greater availability of building materials also allowed those tenants without loans, to try their own hand at house construction using these new materials.

The fact that the islanders' condition had improved financially, and that they were now in greater contact with the outside 'urban' world than ever before 'naturally helped to make crofters much less inward-looking, more inclined to make comparisons between their own position and that of people living in other parts of Britain' (Hunter 1991: 36). In Collier's opinion, the crofter had become 'urged in opposite directions by his instinctive desire to live on in the place where his race and his family were cradled and by his desire to share in the materially richer life he sees in other parts of the country' (Collier 1953: 9). Hilleary (1938: 26) also comments on the 'natural desire for a higher standard of living' as the crofter's life moved from subsistence farming to paid labour. In addition, Hilleary states that '[i]t is probable that were it not for adventitious sources of cash in the form of Unemployment Benefit or Assistance, various types of pensions and housing grants, depopulation would be proceeding with greater rapidity' (ibid.: 26). Also, change would have been less forthcoming had it not been for these types of social benefits that had become available throughout Britain at that time. With the introduction of the old age pension, for example, young people would no doubt have felt more comfortable finding work on the mainland and leaving their older relatives at home on the croft (Smout 1986: 78). The elderly could now afford to live on their pension, particularly with the increased reliance on imported food which meant that they no longer had to work the croft to produce food for themselves.

Of those who stayed, either by choice or because they could not afford to leave and find work elsewhere, it was only natural that they should try and improve their circumstances. As in the pre-war years, women were of prime importance in instigating housing change. Ferguson (2003: 227), for example, describes how his mother finally determined to get out of the 'black-house' in 1932, when her two-year-old son fell into the open hearth which was still in the middle of the floor. Luckily, the boy escaped unharmed. The role of women during the First World War served to boost the confidence of women throughout the United Kingdom, not least with the Act of 1918 that allowed many women to vote, and new areas of employment began to open up for them. The increasing aspirations in housing, sanitation, fashion, and employment, evident in pre-war Lewis, continued during the inter-war years, as

young women in particular, wanted their houses to look cleaner, neater, and more modern, just like the houses they had experienced on the mainland.

It was no doubt on the instigation of the young women that interior decoration became very popular. Many houses were improved with wallpaper, although this had to be replaced regularly while the fire was still in the centre of the floor as it blackened with soot very quickly. Once the hearth moved, it became easier to keep the house clean and this was certainly one of the reasons why the hobble became so popular (CEATS, Folder SC).

The introduction of a gable end and chimney in the upper end of the house is interesting for a number of reasons. First of all, the introduction of a fireplace and chimney in the sleeping area did not necessitate the building of a gable wall, as the presence of stack chimneys in some houses can attest (see Figure 44). It might therefore be supposed that the building of a gable end was to some extent deemed to be socially advantageous as a status symbol.

We then come to the decision to build a fireplace in this end of the house. It is possible that the fireplace was built with the notion of moving the central hearth to the partition wall, and the belief that the sleeping area would therefore need its own source of heat. However, all evidence suggests that the fire in this end of the house was rarely lit – it might be lit if someone was ill for example (Inf. A, Inf. Q) – and it may be assumed that the tenants believed that the need for extra peats to support a second hearth was perhaps a little impractical. The building of the gable end and chimney may therefore have held more social, than material, advantages. Certainly, many mainland cottages by this time would have had gable ends, at least one of which would contain a fireplace and chimney, and most of the houses on the mainland that required domestic servants would have had a fireplace in most rooms.

Figure 44: Stack chimney in the side wall of a house in Brue, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

In addition to this, the new 'white-houses' that were being built in Lewis generally had a chimney at either end of the house and two gable ends. It may well have been to emulate these houses that the gable chimneys were built.

The idea that external housing features might be employed for social advantage can also be seen in the form of the external 'stairs', built into the outer wall, to enable tenants to reach the roof. While most houses that had such a 'stair' followed a standard type of having three or four stones built into and jutting out of the outer wall to form foot-holds, a number of houses employed a much more extravagant method of stair building that can only have been done for show and certainly reflects the skill of the builder (see Figure 45 and Figure 46). It is likely that these stairs are original features and were built in either the late nineteenth or the early twentieth centuries.

Figure 45: 'Stair' outside house 15(b), South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2000)

Figure 46: 'Stair' outside house in Ballantrushal, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

The movement of the central hearth to a stone partition wall between the byre and the living area, and the development of the hearth from this point on, was the most important change during this period. The change in the position of the hearth altered the use of space within the house and hints at the decline of the *cèilidh* tradition, as fewer people could sit round an enclosed hearth, than could sit round a central hearth. The final development of the hearth which saw the smoke being taken out of the house reflects the break between the house and the agricultural cycle as the soot-filled thatch was no longer deemed necessary for use as fertilizer, either because there were fewer crops to fertilize, or because purchased fertilizer had become a viable option.

The growing desire for people to move out of the houses they shared with their cattle, and into new houses reflects both the decline in the number of cows being kept, and, as with the development of the hearth, the break in the connection between house and agriculture. It also shows a desire for a more complete break from the traditional house, despite the fact that the new houses were less well adapted to the climate and had, in many cases, no more sanitary conveniences than the old houses. In many cases, however, the cattle were kept in the old houses therefore providing a supply of manure for the crops and, as the new houses were often built close to, if not adjoining, the old houses, the latter continued to be used as a sanitary convenience.

Emulation no doubt played a part in the spread of change during this period as it did in the pre-war years and evidence suggests that although there were socio-cultural differences between townships, within a township there was more homogeneity. Writing in 1938 or 1939, Gibson (1946: 257), who spent many years as head of the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway (the only secondary school in the island), described the differences to be found in attitudes and traditions between townships stating that 'villages quite near one another will differ in many economic and social details' and that 'each village has its own way of doing things, its own attitudes, and its own tradition of usages.'

We can therefore say that the motivations to change, on the part of the tenants, were those of social and, in some cases, material advantage. Some of the changes, however, although advantageous, also had their down sides. With regard to the movement of the hearth, it not only made the house colder, but fewer people could sit round it to keep warm, or during a *cèilidh*. It may also have proved slightly less accessible for cooking, as the *slabhraidh* (chain) of the central hearth could easily swing out in all directions, unlike the *slabhraidh* of the enclosed hearth. However, the advantages were presumably seen to outweigh the disadvantages, and thus, in most cases, the hearth was moved.

None of the changes were born of necessity, however, and this is shown by the presence of certain continuities. Some tenants, particularly the older inhabitants, had either no motivation to change or no means of change, perhaps due to a lack of money or to a lack of manpower to carry out the desired improvements. It was noted, by the Board of Agriculture, that higher loans had to be given out for the building of new houses in families where there was no capable man to carry out some of the work (BoA 1929: 20). A lack of labour may have combined with a lack of money to restrict the making of improvements in any one house. In many houses the central hearth was retained during this period, no gable end and chimney were built, and no windows were put in. As we shall see, many of these houses began to change after the Second World War while, in some, features such as the central hearth were retained.

7.3 The Second World War and The Post-War Years (post-1939)

7.3.1 Society and Culture

During the Second World War, as during the First, a large proportion of Lewis men saw active service and, throughout Britain, women played a significant part in the war, for example by enlisting in the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service) or by working in industry.

This time, Lewis itself was involved in the war, as the western Highlands and Islands of Scotland were at the forefront of the Battle of the Atlantic (Hughes 1998). This

led to the establishment of a number of air bases throughout the Hebrides, including an air base in Stornoway with outstations at Barvas and Dell (Hughes 1998: 96-102). The construction of the air base provided a valuable source of income for those left at home, with men being transported to and from Stornoway on a daily basis (Lewis Association 1952: 11). This led to 'a great expansion of transport facilities' on the island, to cope with the transportation of workers and military personnel (ibid.: 11). Those women who were left at home spent their time 'digging for victory', working the crofts and sometimes weaving (Hughes 1998: 102; Ferguson 2003: 275; CEATS, Folder SC). The influx of evacuees and of army and navy personnel from the allied countries, and the presence of enemy sea vessels and aircraft around the island meant that even those islanders who stayed at home experienced first-hand the effects of the War.[102]

7.3.1.1 The Economy

Despite the lack of young Lewis men and women at home during the war, there had never been a more prosperous time on the island. According to Collier (1953: 66)

> there was more money in the Highlands than at any time in history. The levels of the War of 1914-18 were left well behind. The main sources of cash income were the service allowances, the subsidies paid by the government on agricultural products – potatoes, sheep and cattle – the wages earned on constructional work by sea and land in certain areas, the enhanced prices realized for fish, and the money spent by forces quartered in the area. The net result was a large increase in the cash income of certain classes in certain areas.

As well as the extra employment provided at the air base, government subsidies for hill cattle and sheep came as an unexpected windfall to the crofters. The subsidies were paid to crofters and small farmers alike, without distinction. Crofters, however, unlike small farmers, tended to earn most of their income from non-agricultural sources such as weaving, and therefore the subsidies, while welcomed by the crofters, were not enough of an inducement for them to effectively produce more food from their land, either by stock or by crop:

> In the case of a Lewis crofter, the subsidies did not augment his income to such an extent as to be a real inducement to improvement of land or increase of stock. His earnings from sources other than agricultural were never better and

[102] For a first-hand account of life in Lewis during the Second World War, see Ferguson (2003: 272-88). For more information about the War in the Highlands and Islands in general, see Hughes (1998).

> his need of cash payments by the Government was never less than during the war years when the Subsidy Schemes came into operation (Lewis Association 1952: 23).

In fact the extent of arable land under cultivation, which had been declining during the inter-war years, continued to decline during the war, despite government subsidies and the introduction of tractors, loaned by the Department of Agriculture. The result of the Government's 'grassland ploughing scheme', which offered £2 per acre of old grassland brought under crops, was that 'considerable areas of old grassland were brought back under the plough, while at the same time, much of the arable land went out of cultivation. By 1944 the total tillage acreage in Lewis was less than in 1939' (Lewis Association 1952: 22). The decrease in cultivation continued after the war and, by the early 1950s, the tendency was for land that could not easily be ploughed by a tractor to be left uncultivated and used for grazing (ibid.: 11-12, 16). The Lewis Association explained this decline in cultivation as a result of the crofters' increased reliance on other forms of income:

> The explanation of this probably lies in the fact that the croft has during the period gradually become rather a subsidiary than a main source of livelihood to the crofter, other occupations such as fishing, sailing, general labouring, and in later years weaving having become more remunerative occupations than agriculture. So long as a crofter could command sufficient arable land to provide the keep of 1 or 2 cows and supply him and his family with potatoes and some vegetables and meal (usually barley) he had no further use for arable land (Lewis Association 1952: 26).

The decline in arable land was partly connected to the decline in cattle, and the consequent rise in the numbers of sheep. By 1952, there were more than twice as many sheep in Lewis as there had been in 1918, and less than half the number of cattle (Lewis Association 1952: 18). This was partly because sheep were easier to look after than cattle but, once again, was probably largely due to higher demands for wool as a result of the successful tweed industry (ibid.: 23). In Bragar, as early as 1953, every second house was without a cow, and tractors were fast replacing horses. By that time, two tenants in Bragar had a tractor, which was hired out for use by other tenants, and there were only twenty horses left in the township (Mhurchaidh 1953: 27). By 1957, there were three tractors in the township, and only five horses (Jaatinen 1957: 65). Jaatinen seems to suggest, however, that the tractors were

mainly used for bringing home peat (ibid.: 65), and this may well have been the case – given the stony nature of the soil in the area, tractors would only have been able to plough so much of the land.

After the war the tweed industry rocketed and, despite a dip in production in the late 1940s and early 1950s due to the imposition of a $66^{2/3}$ per cent purchase tax (Geddes 1955: 294-95), continued to provide employment for a large proportion of the Lewis population, both in spinning and in weaving until the late 1960s when it reached its peak (Hunter 2001: 16).[103] On the West Side of Lewis, Darling's *West Highland Survey* showed that, by the late 1940s, weaving was a part-time occupation in all fourteen townships, with only two townships also earning money through fishing (Darling 1955: 343). By 1953, there was hardly a house in Bragar that had no loom in it, and the tweed industry was the mainstay of the community (Mhurchaidh 1953: 27). Young men and women finishing school might spend a few years at home, working in the tweed industry, before leaving the island, often to train as nurses and sailors (ibid.: 27).

The fishing industry continued to offer employment to some islanders after the war, although neither the herring fishing nor the inshore white fishing recovered after the depression of the 1930s. The demand for herring gutters and packers had fallen in the 1930s and young women stopped travelling to the seasonal herring fishing after the Second World War (Geddes 1955: 287).

The decline in arable cultivation and in cattle husbandry, together with the rise in sheep farming, was symptomatic of the continuing trend away from a subsistence economy, and towards a cash economy. In 1952, the Lewis Association commented that:

> [t]he crofter of to-day values his croft not so much as a productive unit but rather as a symbol of his independence, offering the additional advantages of a cheap home, security of tenure, and a useful subsidiary to wage-earning employment or other sources of income (Lewis Association 1952: 32).

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[103] After a slump in the market in 1970 the industry never quite regained its former glory (see Hunter 2001: 287-99). For more information about the Tweed industry in Lewis see Thompson (1968) and Hunter (2001).

The increased reliance on purchased goods meant an increased reliance on a cash income with crofters having 'more and more to look elsewhere for the means to bridge the gap between a rapidly-rising standard of living and that which is possible on the meagre resources of his croft' (Lewis Association 1952: 32). Darling (1955: 344) commented that the tweed industry was now proving a much more lucrative way of earning than working the croft, quoting one crofter who stated:

> To tell you the truth, the croft is an encumbrance. I can earn over a pound a day at the loom, so that when I do anything else I lose money. How many days does it take to get the ground ready for the potatoes, plant them, earth them, dig them and pit them? They are expensive potatoes when I think of the pounds I would have got from the weaving.

It was more economical for this crofter to spend his time on the loom, and buy potatoes with the money he was earning. However, those who remained on the island, and even those who left, were reluctant to give up their crofts completely. The Lewis Association (1952: 11) put this down to the fact that the crofter was 'alive to the possibilities of his croft as a refuge against possible bad times'. It was also, no doubt, a result of the strong connection which many crofters felt with the land, as one crofter told the Taylor Commission (1954: 31): 'If I was not born there and the very dust of the place dear to me, I would quit to-morrow.'

Around 1948, the Lewis Association commented that Lewis was going through a 'transition phase' with traditional foods being replaced by those purchased from shops or grocery vans (Lewis Association c.1948: 7). There were certainly more opportunities in the post-war years for people to purchase such items. By 1953, Bragar had at least 5 local shops (Mhurchaidh 1953: 26) and mail-order catalogues were available offering clothes and furniture (CEATS, Folder SC; Inf. J, Inf. N). By 1957, a butcher's van and a baker's van came round the township three times a week, and there was also a mobile bank (Jaatinen 1957: 65). In 1965, the daily milk-run began, bringing milk (*boinne a' rothaid* – 'road milk') from Stornoway to rural townships (*Gearrannan* n.d.). It therefore became unnecessary to keep a cow to provide the family with milk.

7.3.1.2 Depopulation

The decline of the fishing industry, and the precarious nature of the tweed industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s due to the increase in tax, led to many returning servicemen and their families leaving the island to find work (Lewis Association 1952: 58; Hunter 1991: 64).[104]

The changing demographics of the island may also have contributed to the decline in cultivation as, more than ever, young people were leaving the island and the population was becoming more aged. Elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands, and in the Northern Isles, the population had reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century. In Lewis, however (and also in Harris and Barra) the population did not peak until 1911 when it reached 29,532. By 1931, the population had fallen to 25,079 and by 1951, the population was 23,595 (Darling 1955: 81), representing a fall of just over twenty per cent between 1911 and 1951. This fell to 21,937 in 1961, and to 20,739 in 1971 (Murray 1973: 308-09).[105]

In Bragar, Mhurchaidh (1953: 27-28) commented that smaller families and a large number of unmarried men and women had resulted in the local school having only seventy pupils in 1953, as opposed to the 201 pupils when the school opened in 1883. However this is also partly due, she says, to pupils going to school either in Shawbost or Stornoway once they reached the age of twelve: 'Tha carbadan a' giùlan nan sgoilearan air ais is air adhart gach là' ('Pupils are bussed to and from the schools every day', this author's translation) (ibid.: 28). According to Collier (1953: 5), declining fertility, as well as the decline in the numbers of women of a child-bearing age, contributed to the smaller number of children.

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[104] Although there was certainly a high level of unemployment in the years immediately following the Second World War, the exact situation is difficult to gauge. According to Hunter (1991: 64), by the end of 1946, unemployment in Lewis was around forty per cent. This may have been the case on paper, however both Geddes (1955: 284-88) and, in particular, Collier (1953: 93-95) hint that, while there were many genuine claims of unemployment benefit, there were not a few less genuine claims which amounted to crofters supplementing their income at times when they would have been idle anyway. This seems to have been the case in the years preceding the Second World War, and may therefore also have been the case in the post-war years.

[105] For a more detailed analysis of population trends in the Highlands and Islands from 1900 to the 1950s, see Collier (1953: 128-41) and Darling (1955: 69-152).

The main reason for the depopulation which occurred from 1911 onwards was simply a lack of suitable employment on the island. Tied up with this, however, was a desire for a more modern way of life than could be found in the island, particularly given the economic conditions. As Hunter (1991: 64) explains,

> [c]rofters in the 1940s and 1950s were a good deal better off materially than were crofters in the 1930s; just as crofters in the 1930s had been incomparably better situated than their nineteenth-century predecessors. In relation to what was happening in most other parts of the United Kingdom, however, the progress being made in the crofting areas continued to be much less impressive. By the end of the 1940s, in fact, it was clear that the age-old economic gulf between the north of Scotland and the rest of Britain was, if anything, tending to grow even wider.

In 1953, domestic service and the Merchant Navy were still popular employers, and with this came the fear that 'young people leaving the Island for long periods may settle permanently on the mainland' (Lewis Association 1952: 49). In the early 1950s, according to Darling (1955: 414), there was still a 'considerable proportion of young folk' in Lewis, which kept the social scene alive, and this suggests, as does the population pyramid for 1931 (ibid.: 134), that young folk did not begin to leave the island until the ages of twenty to twenty-five.[106] By 1944, the Lewis Association (1944: 49) could comment that 'the proportion of old people in the Lewis population is between 60% and 70% above the proportion in the country generally'. This was seen by the Association as a serious problem in relation to the growth of crofting: 'In all districts there is an undue preponderance of old people, which makes innovations difficult, and throws a burden on the few active crofters when Township schemes have to be carried out' (Lewis Association 1952: 58-59).

In the 1940s and 50s, education also continued to 'encourage' young people to leave the island with its 'urban orientation' (Collier 1953: 58). Those who were academically gifted were immediately sent to school on the mainland and, according to Mrs Marion Fraser Darling, it was often felt in crofting townships that those who remained had failed to succeed in life: 'There was an awful feeling in many townships that it was only the duds who were left' (AF81/8).

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[106] Care must be taken, however, when interpreting population statistics from the 1920s to the 1950s as trends may simply be reflecting war-time casualties.

The Lewis Association also saw that there were legislative pressures which encouraged migration from the island. Not least of these was the unemployment benefit which, while it suited many crofters, left others choosing between employment on the mainland, or unemployment without benefit on the island:

> The movement away from the Island is accelerated by the pressure of social legislation. The Harris Tweed weaver is not eligible for unemployment benefit when out of work, and in order to safeguard his other benefits must still continue to stamp his card as a self-employed person, even although he is earning nothing. As a result, he is forced to leave the industry and the Island. Crofters who are part-time labourers are often compelled to take jobs on the mainland or give up their unemployment benefit (Lewis Association 1952: 58).

It was not just men who were turning their backs on the island. More and more women had experience of life outside the island and were not willing to return to the hardships that life had in store for a crofter's wife. Women were an integral part of the crofting community and without them, crofting risked going into permanent decline. This posed a serious problem for the authorities who recognised the extent of the young island-woman's dilemma:

> If it is a question of comfort, convenience, or entertainment, crofting life compares unfavourably with urban conditions, especially for women. The crofter's wife has to take a hand in all the operations on the croft and over and above the cares of the house and family which she shares with her sister in the town she may have to carry water from the well, often some distance away, and to bring her household supplies along township roads which in winter may be not only inconvenient but actually dangerous. It is no great exaggeration to say that the key to the whole crofting problem lies in the hands of the women, especially the young women. If they elect to stay in the township, there is hope for the future. If they leave, they will probably never return (Taylor 1954: 33).

Women were not just important to the community as crofters' wives, however. A number of Highland townships were in danger of extinction due to the lack of women. Collier (1953: 58) mentions the township of Totscore in Skye, which became well known in the mid-twentieth century because 'until a recent marriage, there was not one woman in it, a phenomenon attributed to the absence of a road.' It is unlikely that the situation was ever quite this extreme in Lewis, although one informant commented that by the time the men returned from the war, many of the island girls were married (Inf. J).

In general, it was noted by all concerned that in order to keep the communities alive, young people had to be actively encouraged to stay or to return to live in crofting

areas such as rural Lewis. For the men, employment was the key; for the women, it seemed, sanitation and amenities were the key, and it was accepted that 'young people who have known other conditions will not go back to a rural life where water has to be carried in buckets from distant wells, where sanitation is primitive, and housing inadequate' (Lewis Association c.1948: vii). These were symptoms of a general rise in the standard of living throughout Britain, and Lewis folk were more in contact with the rest of Britain than ever before:

> In keeping with the outlook of the times, new standards of living have come to be adopted, youth wanting more (for less labour) than the crofts can yield. More recently, the emphasis has come to be placed rather on better sanitation and higher standards of comfort and amenity, as in other rural areas (Collier 1953: 58).[107]

7.3.2 Housing

The Lewis Association (1944: 43) estimated in 1944 that 'well over 4000' new houses were needed in rural Lewis and, after the Second World War, the trend towards building new houses took off once more.

The Department of Agriculture loans for crofter housing, which had been suspended during the war, were resumed in the spring of 1946 (DoA 1949: 77). By the end of 1948, one hundred and eighteen loans, amounting to £66,790 had been awarded in Lewis, one hundred and eight for new houses, and ten for housing improvements (ibid.: 115). Between 1946 and 1948, £12,027 7s 6d was spent on materials at the Department's Carloway store, £9,178 5s 4d of which was in cash sales and £2,849 2s 2d as advances against building loans (ibid.: 116).

House building in Lewis really took off, however, when, in 1949, the Department of Agriculture began offering grants, as well as loans, for the construction of new houses and for the improvement of existing houses (DoA 1950: 52). Grants of up to £500 were offered to cover half of the cost of labour and materials in the construction of a new house (ibid: 52.). Many islanders took up the Department's offer. Geddes (1955: 316), describing 1953 as 'a fairly typical year', reported that one hundred and eighty loans and grants, totalling £81,000 had been provided by the Department of

[107] Collier (1953: 58) adds in a footnote that the desires of the crofting youth were '[s]ymbolized in the phrase of one observer as "bicycles for the boys and silk stockings for the girls"'.

Agriculture for housing in Lewis. A further £20,000 was spent on housing by the Local Authority (ibid.: 318). Ferguson (2003: 300-01) described how his parents had saved enough money by 1953 to afford to build a new house: his father drew up the plans and '[w]ith some modifications and improvements to Iain's design, the Board of Agriculture gave us permission to proceed and approved a grant and loan.' One informant described to me how he obtained a grant from the Department in the 1950s to build a new house (Inf. E). To keep costs down, most people did as much of the work as they could themselves, and he described using some of the stones from the old house to make up the foundations for the new house. In some cases, two or more houses were built together so that while the cement of one house was drying out, the men would work on the cement for the other house (Inf. J). Mixing cement by hand to form concrete was the most arduous task of house building in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Cement, sand, and shingle would be mixed together with water in pails and the water for mixing had to be collected from the nearest well or loch (Inf. J). Gathering the shingle from the shore was hard work (CEATS, Folder SC) and, as the house building took place alongside the regular croft-work, it could be quite a long, drawn out process (Inf. J). Most of the new houses were built just behind, or just in front of the old houses, which would continue to be used as byres or barns. Figure 47 shows some of the houses built in Bragar after the Second World War.

Figure 47: Bragar houses built post-WW2

(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

Some tenants preferred to fund the process themselves, thus freeing them from the Department of Agriculture's planning constraints (Inf. F).[108] Post-war shortages in materials prevented building on a mass scale from taking place in the years immediately following the war. However, it seems as if not all tenants in Lewis were put off by rationed building materials:

> Many a house has appeared in Lewis since the war that had nothing to do with quotas and permits and allocations. The Hebridean is an artist at overcoming the fantastic man-made difficulties which officialdom erects. If you can buy timber to the value of only £1 in a month, and you need £10 worth, well, your friends and relations buy their £1 worth with your money and you go ahead. [...]
>
> The Lewisman gets some cement, he carts some sand and gravel, and he has always taken care of his driftwood; so he goes ahead with his foundations, builds the walls with poured concrete to waist height, erects scaffolding with the few long-enough bits of wood he possesses or can borrow, and builds the rest of one wall. Then the bit of scaffolding and the frames go round to the next wall.
>
> (Darling 1955: 297)

In the early 1940s, there was still a problem with overcrowding and the provision of land for squatters. In 1944, the Lewis Association (1944: 44) stated that: 'The main housing and planning problem is to provide for the overflow from the crofts – the problem of the second son.' '[I]n the case of squatters,' wrote Collier (1953: 110-11), 'the provision of housing is linked with the acquisition of pastoral or arable land.' The Lewis Association suggested that this problem might be solved by non-crofters (i.e. cottars and squatters) being afforded the same grants and loans as crofters, and that the Local Authority should be 'induced to build houses in rural Lewis to a much greater extent than hitherto' (Lewis Association 1944: 44). The Local Authorities were unwilling to provide new houses for tenants in rural areas, largely because the crofters had always looked after their own housing in the past, and because they did not pay rates on their houses (Collier 1953: 110). The Lewis Association (c.1948: 1) explained that the lack of County Council intervention meant that 'no provision has

---

[108] State planning permission was introduced in 1947. It may be assumed that those tenants taking out a Department of Agriculture loan had to comply both with planning permission and with the Department's own regulations, whereas tenants building new houses without State or Department help did not have to adhere to the Department's regulations, and very possibly did not apply for planning permission.

been made for special classes such as the aged, and the very poor, who cannot build for themselves', and that

> [u]nless the County Council assumes its responsibilities and provides houses for all who cannot provide them for themselves, much of the work which is being done by the County Council itself as a Public Health authority, especially in its T.B. schemes, will be nullified (Lewis Association c.1948: 1).

7.3.2.1 Water and Electricity

By the late 1940s and into the early 1950s, the main concern, in relation to both housing improvement and depopulation, was the absence of piped water, sewerage and electricity. Water and sewerage, in particular, were seen as essential, not only for the provision of sanitation, but also because the younger generation, particularly the women, were no longer willing to live in houses where there was no running water.

The Taylor Commission (1954: 20) was left in 'no doubt as to the over-riding importance of providing all croft houses with a piped water supply' and Marion Fraser Darling, in her evidence to the Commission (AF81/8), defined the essence of that feeling, reporting that, '[i]f asked whether she would rather have electricity or water and sanitation, she would say you can keep your electricity if you give me water and sanitation. Electricity was good, but not nearly so important as water.' She, too, noted the lack of women in crofting townships and the crucial importance of a piped water supply to help redress the balance (ibid.). The desire for water over electricity is also borne out in the wealth of information contained within the files of *Comunn Eachdraidh an Taobh Siar* (The West Side Historical Society). Although electricity was very much appreciated when it arrived, the arrival of water was much more eagerly anticipated:

> Th'abair gu robh beachd math againn air an electric nuair a thàinig e. [...] Thàinig an electric agus am bùrn dhan bhaile seo glè fhaisg air an aon àm. 'S e am bùrn bu mhotha ris an robh sinn a' coimhead as a' latha ud bhon bha tòrr obair ann a' tarraing bùrn gu beathaichean agus marsin. Cha do chuir sinn meas air an electric gus an d' fhuair sinn e (CEATS Folder SC).
>
> Boy did we think the world of the electricity when it arrived. [...] The electricity and the water arrived here around about the same time. We were more looking forward to the water in those days as there was a lot of work

> involved in getting water for the cattle and things. We didn't really appreciate the electricity until we got it (this author's translation).

Both electricity and piped water reached Bragar in 1952 (Mhurchaidh 1953: 25), however this was not the case throughout Lewis as, by 1968, a number of houses were yet to be plumbed in, and around four per cent of houses had yet to be connected to the electricity supply (Thompson 1968: 196). Garenin, for example, did not receive piped water until the 1960s (*Gearrannan* n.d.).

Many, but not all, of the old houses had electricity installed (Inf. D, Inf. F), and some had water plumbed in to a stand pipe outside the front door (Murray 1966: 176). Electric stoves were sometimes installed at the back of the hobble, in the passageway between the living area and the byre (Inf. F). In some houses, the hearth was replaced by a non-electric stove (see Figure 48).

Figure 48: Stove in a house in Dalbeg, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

7.3.2.2 New Houses

In Bragar, it seems that many of the new houses became occupied in the early 1950s (Inf. F, Inf. J). By 1953, out of just over one hundred houses in Bragar (containing about five hundred and fifty inhabitants), there were only around ten old, thatched houses still occupied in the township, mostly by elderly men and women *'aig nach eil comas air tigh ùr a thogail, agus aig nach eil duine air son a chumail ged a thogadh iad e'* ('who don't have the ability to build a new house, nor anyone to see to its upkeep even if they did build one', this author's translation) (Mhurchaidh 1953: 25). In the previous two years, nearly twenty new houses had been built in the township (Mhurchaidh 1953: 25). By 1960, in Arnol, there were nine inhabited thatched houses, one of which, as described below, retained the central hearth (Fenton 1995: 33). The Department of Agriculture's remit was extended in 1960, when it became the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. Houses built with Department grants and loans became widely known as DAFS houses although they remained, in Gaelic, *Taighean a' Bhùird* (Board Houses).

By the mid-1960s, most, but not all, tenants in Lewis were living in modern houses. Not all of the modern houses had been built to modern standards, however, as many of the new houses built in the pre-war and inter-war years had no sanitary provisions. This was not uncommon at the time, particularly in areas where there was no piped water supply. By the 1980s, however, the preponderance of these houses in crofting areas throughout Scotland had led to a higher than average percentage of the population living in what has been called 'below tolerable standard' housing (Shucksmith 1987: 132).[109]

7.3.2.3 Vernacular Houses

Despite the number of new houses being built, many of the old houses continued to be occupied and, over the years, these saw many improvements. New materials

[109] 'After the passing of the Housing (Scotland) Act, 1925, the Scottish Board of Health urged local authorities, on the basis of the surveys which they were making under Section 5 of that Act, to make full use of their powers to require the provision, wherever reasonably practicable, of sufficient sanitary conveniences for every house' (Welsh 1947: 26). By 1936, however, a survey of three rural parishes, found that twenty nine per cent of houses in these areas had no sanitary conveniences (ibid.: 27).

came to be used in old houses, as well as in new. Figure 49, for example, shows a concrete hobble with in-built shelf, in the same style as the stone hobbles, in a house in Brue on the West Side of Lewis. This photograph also shows the holes on either side of the open flue where the front panel of metal would be attached. A concrete enclosed chimney (Figure 50) was built in a house in South Bragar in the 1950s, by neighbours, for an elderly lady who previously had a central hearth (Inf. A).

Figure 49: Concrete hobble and shelf in house in Brue, Lewis
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

Apart from the introduction of piped water, sewerage, and electricity, the changes in the traditional housing in the years following the war were mostly changes in interior decoration. '*Aig an teine*' (the living area), which had always been the centre of the house, retained its position as the focus of daily activities, although the space between the living area and the byre, which had gained more significance over the years, was sometimes used for cooking if there was an electric stove. The living area often became wallpapered and, in some houses, linoleum or carpet was put down on top of a concrete floor, or timber boards were laid.

Figure 50: Concrete chimney built in the 1950s, South Bragar
(Photograph taken by the author, 2004)

The '*teine*' (fire), which had always been the centre of the living area, retained its position as the centre of attention. Where the fireplace became enclosed, a mantelpiece was added, and this became something of a status symbol, displaying, among other things, ornaments which had been brought back from the seasonal herring fishing before the Second World War, and gifts and cards that had arrived from relatives overseas:

> Tha cuimhne agam a' chiad mantelpiece bha againn fhèin as an taigh-dubh. Bhiodh oir brass timcheall air agus th'abair gum biodh sinn a' toirt shine as. Bha sinn gu math spaideil le sin. Se ballaichean glaine uaine bhiodh sin a' faighinn air an tràigh a bhiodh againn air a' mhantelpiece ar ornaments. Biodh sgàthan ann cuideachd (CEATS, Folder SC).
>
> I remember the first mantelpiece we had in our black house. There was a brass edge to it and boy did we get a shine out of it. We were very smart with that. We used to put green glass balls, that we'd find on the beach, on the mantelpiece as ornaments. There'd be a mirror too (this author's translation).

Fancy trims might be bought for the mantelpiece and the fireplace itself was whitewashed regularly with whiting. There might also be an iron kerb to the fire (Inf. A). The dresser too, was an important status symbol with all the crockery arranged 'just so'. A good example of a dresser can be seen in Figure 51 below.

In the 1950s and 1960s, more household furniture began to be bought, particularly items such as factory-made tables and chairs. These were often bought through a 'club', with a group of women then sending to Stornoway for them (Inf. J), or from mail-order catalogues (Inf. N). In some areas, it became common for the sleeping area to become the 'good room', where such purchased items of furniture would be kept, and where distinguished guests such as the minister would be taken (Inf. H). One informant remembered returning to his native village after a long absence and being surprised that the neighbour he visited took him into 'the good room' (Inf. H).

Perhaps the most notable of the old houses, at least on the west coast of Lewis, were the houses in the township of Garenin, and the house at 42 Arnol. In 1974, the five remaining elderly residents of the old houses in Garenin were removed into newly built council houses. By 1974, the thatched houses in Garenin had been substantially modernised (see Figure 51). The cattle had been taken out of the house, concrete floors had been laid and covered with carpet or linoleum, there was a chimney in the gable wall, and papered walls and ceilings. These houses would have contained many of the 'mod-cons' present in the new houses of that time. A number of the old houses in Garenin were later taken over by the Garenin Trust and have since been re-built to conform to current Building Regulations, and opened as museums, hostels, and self-catering accommodation as part of the 'Gearrannan Blackhouse Village' (http://www.gearrannan.com).

In 1964, the house at 42 Arnol was still occupied although it was less 'improved' than the houses in Garenin (see Figure 52, Figure 53, and Figure 54). The lower end of the house was still used as a byre, although there was a passageway flanked by timber partitions between the byre and the living area. The living area contained a central hearth with no chimney or smoke-hole. There was one small window in the

sleeping area (which was separated from the living area by a timber partition), but no gable or chimney (Fenton 1995). This house was taken over by Historic Scotland in the 1960s, and was turned into a 'Blackhouse Museum'.

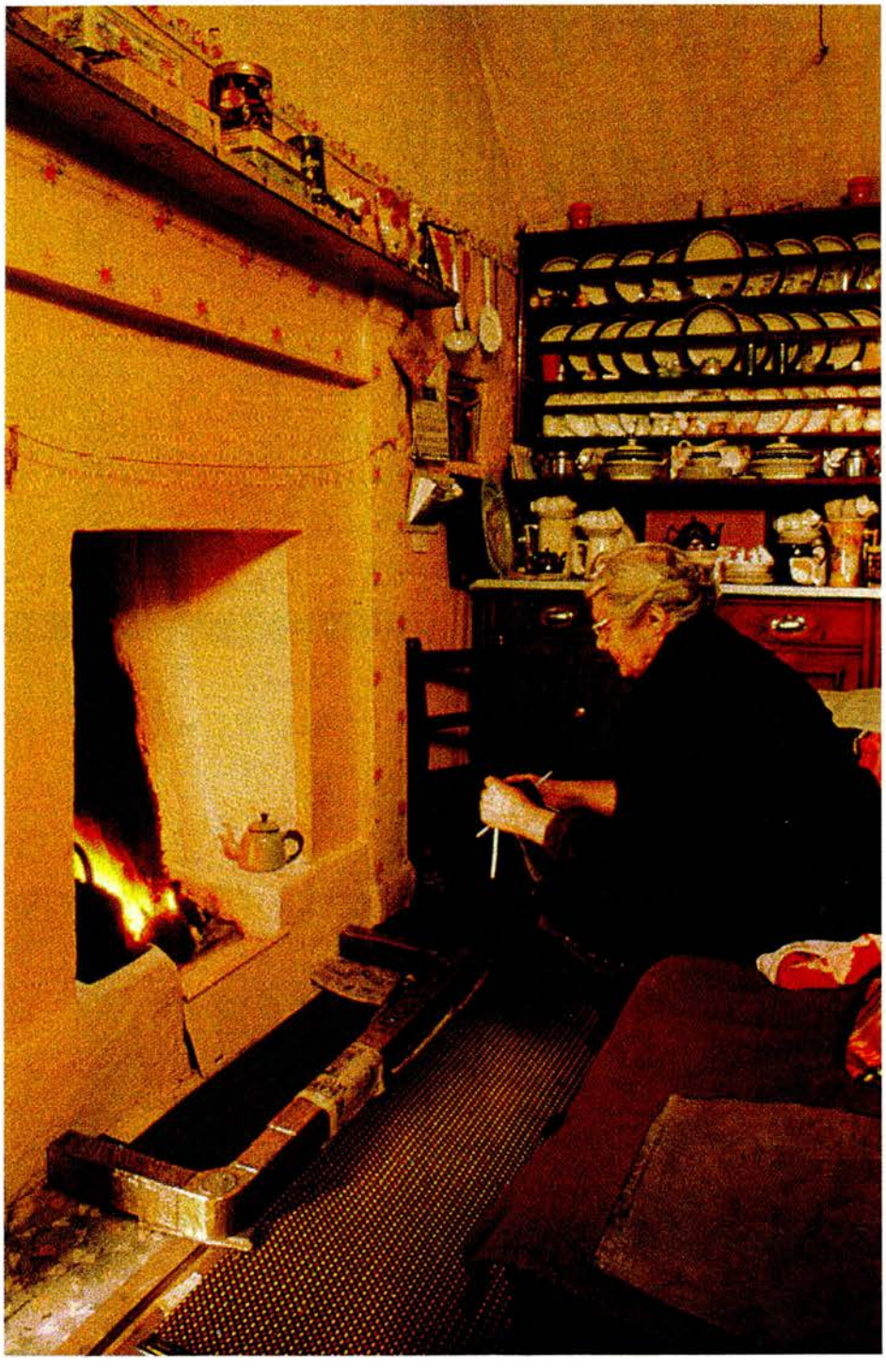


Figure 51: Peigi an t-Seòladir at the fire in her thatched house in Garenin, 1970
(Reproduced with the kind permission of National Geographic)

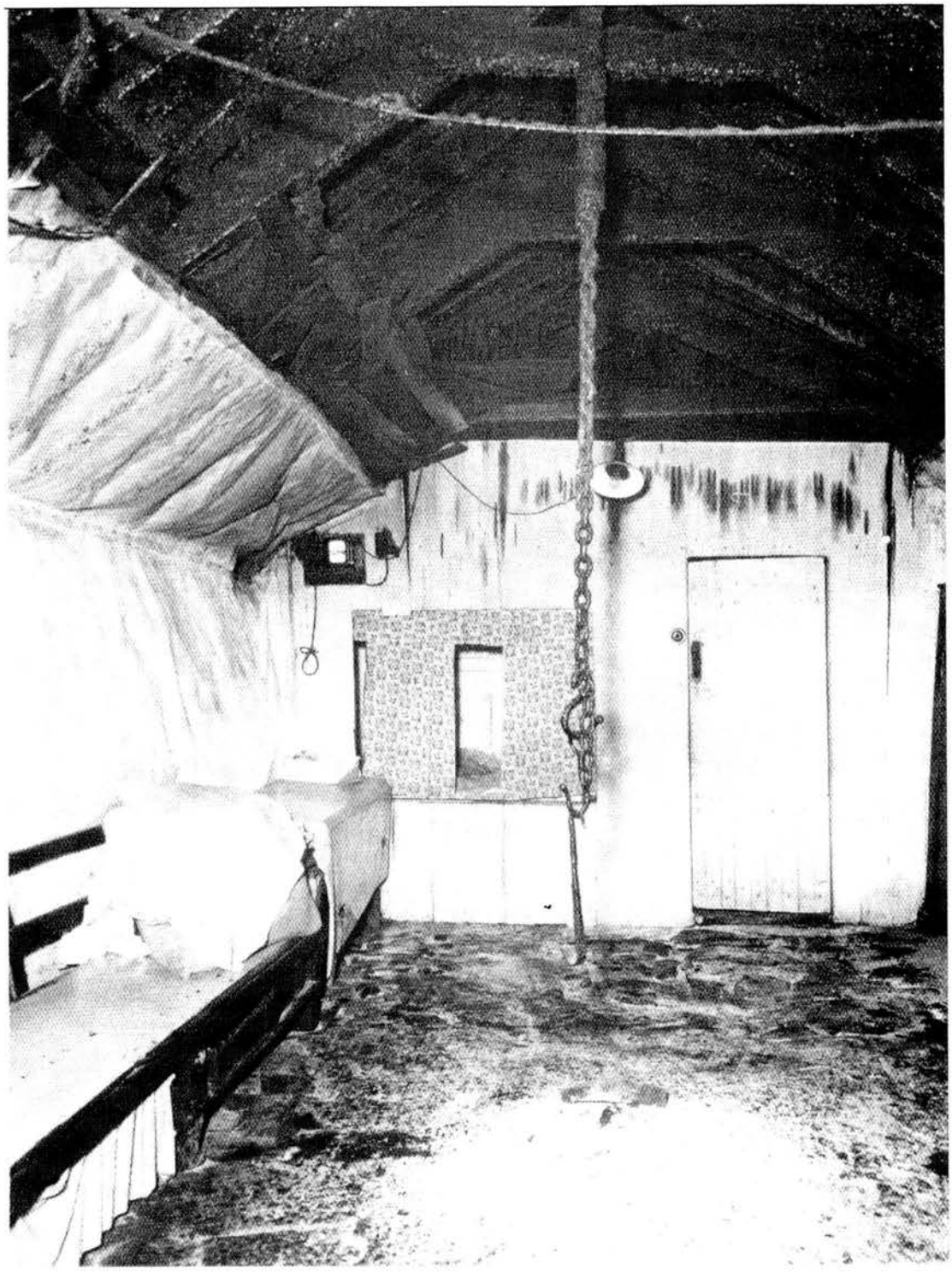


Figure 52: The Interior of 42 Arnol in 1966

'*Aig an teine*', looking towards the sleeping area with the '*leabaidh taobh an teine*' ('bed beside the fire') on the left. (Crown Copyright, reproduced courtesy of Historic Scotland)

Figure 53: The Interior of 42 Arnol in 1966

'*Aig an teine*', looking towards the byre with the dresser on the left. (Crown Copyright, reproduced courtesy of Historic Scotland)

Figure 54: The Interior of 42 Arnol in 1966

The bedroom, looking towards the living area. (Crown Copyright, reproduced courtesy of Historic Scotland)

The two examples represented by the house of Peigi an t-Seòladair in Garenin and the house at 42 Arnol, serve to show the extremes of conditions that were to be found in old Lewis houses as late as the 1960s and 1970s. In 1980 a survey of the west coast of Lewis, from Calanais to Ness, by Lancaster University, found three improved black-houses still occupied, all by elderly inhabitants (Whyte 1980). As far as I am aware, there are none occupied today.

7.3.3 Housing Change and Continuity

As we have seen, during and after the Second World War tenants in Lewis continued to be drawn into a cash-economy. In 1952, the Lewis Association reported that '[d]uring the second world war the process of industrialising the crofter was accelerated' (Lewis Association 1952: 11). The Association was talking in relation to agriculture, but the sentiment equally applies to other areas of life in Lewis. Money became increasingly important after the Second World War and the inter-war decline in cultivation continued. The influx of purchased food, clothes, and other goods meant that people no longer had to provide their own. Whereas, in the early nineteenth century, people had to make whatever they needed to survive, it was now possible for them to purchase all of the daily necessities, and, particularly with the growth of the tweed industry, it became easier for tenants to work to earn money to pay for these goods than it was for them to work to produce the goods themselves. The intervention of the State, through various benefits, grants and loans, aided the movement to a cash-economy.

The standard of living in Lewis also continued to rise. After the Second World War, the desire for better houses spread and there were fewer barriers to improvement. People had more disposable income, grants and loans were made available to build new houses and improve existing houses, and people, particularly women, more than ever before wanted the types of modern house and amenities that could be found in most towns and villages on the mainland. Amenities that had, in the past, been desirable, now became perceived as necessities:

> [i]t is a feature of modern life that a measure of amenity has become a necessity; it is no longer regarded as an indulgence. The young, in particular, refuse to lead dull lives of unremitting toil. They demand a due measure of brightness and the right to meet and mix with other people (Crofters Commission 1957: 20).

The role of women in the development of the Lewis house continued after the Second World War. During the pre-war and inter-war years, the women's influence had been quite direct, for example in the implementation of interior decoration. In the post-war years, however, their main influence was perhaps less direct, although no less subtle. Throughout the early twentieth century, women had the increasing opportunity to travel and to take a more active role in the British economy and in mainland society. This continued, and even escalated, during the Second World War, as the place of women in society began to change throughout Britain. Lewis women increasingly had the opportunity to obtain employment outside of the island, not just for seasonal labour or in domestic service, but in more permanent and prestigious positions. Furthermore, the longer women were away from the island, the more likely they were to marry away and to settle down. It is possible that the strength of the authorities' desire to see piped water, improved sanitation, and electricity extended throughout rural Lewis was in no small part due to their concerns at the growing reluctance of island women to remain on the croft.

> The traditionary role which women have played in the crofting economy will satisfy them no longer, nor indeed is it consistent with their status and opportunities in the modern world. It is therefore of prime importance to discover and develop crofting occupations in which women can engage in their own right and not merely as unpaid assistants to their menfolk (Taylor 1954: 35).

The tourist industry was seen by both the Taylor Commission and the Crofters Commission as the ideal new industry to complement crofting, in which the women would take an active role. For this, however, indoor sanitation was essential (Taylor 1954: 77). The introduction of piped water and electricity were by far the most important developments in post-war housing in the Highlands and Islands and it affected both traditional housing and new housing.

The move to new houses was probably as much due to the desires and efforts of the island men as it was to the desires and persuasions of the island women. Young men were also becoming disillusioned with the crofting way of life and it was recognised

that increased employment opportunities and improved social amenities were essential to keep the young men on the island. In 1954, the Taylor Commission noted that '[t]wo wars and the obligations of national service have done much to loosen the ties which bind people to their native place and the young people have all been away from home for longer or shorter periods' (Taylor 1954: 35).

Improved communications to and from the island greatly affected island life and brought it closer to that of the mainland. Within the island, as cars and motorbikes became more common, they played a part in the decline of the social life that was typical in the early twentieth century and '*danns a' rothaid*' was replaced by dances in village halls or entertainments in Stornoway. The introduction of television in 1959 (Thompson 1968: 152) marked, for many islanders, the final death knell of the *cèilidh* (CEATS Folder SC).

The society and culture of the island was changing and, with it, ideas about comfort, sanitation, and an acceptable standard of living. Tenants not only had the financial means to change but their motivations to change had become stronger as living standards rose and they became increasingly assimilated into a different way of life. Collier (1953: 8), wrote in the 1950s, that

> [w]hat has happened is the intrusion within the last eighty years into the old Highland way of living and thinking, of those ideas of material progress which had accompanied the Industrial Revolution in southern Britain nearly a hundred years earlier but which never really took root in the extreme north and west at that time (Collier 1953: 8).

Indeed, the process which had started in the mid-nineteenth century with the introduction of purchased goods, had escalated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to bring the islanders' lifestyle more into line with the lifestyles of those in mainland towns and cities.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the tenants themselves were taking the decision to modernise their homes, and changes in housing became more predominant, and continuities less. Those continuities which did exist, such as the retention of the central hearth in some houses, were probably due more to a financial or material inability to implement change than to a desire not to implement change.

Despite this, there may have been some people who preferred their own thatched house to a new concrete house, but over time these people died out or were moved into new accommodation by the State, as happened at Garenin.

It could be argued that fewer changes took place in houses where there were no able-bodied men present. However, where a woman's husband had died in the war, the Widow's Pension would offer a regular source of cash income for her and her children until they were old enough to work for themselves. In this case, a single woman might have been better placed to implement housing changes than, for example, a family in which there were one or more able-bodied men with no cash income.

A number of my informants (e.g. Inf. I), and a number of those who were interviewed by *Comunn Eachdraidh an Taobh Siar* (CEATS, Folder SC) commented that people's attitudes had changed over the course of the twentieth century. In the early-to-mid-twentieth century, everybody was seen to be in a similar position and nobody thought any better of themselves than anyone else. This changed, however, in the mid-to-late twentieth century, as people became more house-proud and tried to better themselves.

The attitude towards the traditional houses also changed during this period. When Darling compiled his *West Highland Survey* in 1955, he found that 'Gaeldom has become sensitive about its old "black house" and there is a curious prestige about the new "white house"' (Darling 1955: 290). This balance has been redressed to some extent with the success of the 'Blackhouse Museum' at 42 Arnol and the recent expansion of the 'Gearrannan Blackhouse Village', although both the Museum and the Village portray the houses in a somewhat sanitised and nostalgic light. These developments themselves represent an encouraging sign that the cultural and historical importance of these buildings is finally being recognised by local and national institutions alike, and that the general public are now being given the opportunity to learn about the symbiotic relationship between the house, the land, and the people of Lewis.

Conclusion

The housing improvements that occurred during the first fourteen years of the twentieth century were encouraged by a number of common threads. First of all, many crofters, cottars, and squatters had a higher monetary income than in the period of relative poverty during the 1880s. Many families also received added income from relations who had either moved to the mainland to find work, or who had emigrated, and were sending money home.

Improvements at this time were being made largely through emulation. An important part of this was the desire of the women in the Lewis townships to emulate the types of houses and housing conditions they were seeing when they went to the mainland to work in the fishing industry or in domestic service. Once improvements started to be made at home, emulation among neighbours then encouraged the spread of improvement within the townships.

However, despite the seemingly widespread improvements in housing on Lewis in the early twentieth century, it seems that the majority of houses remained unimproved. Some people wanted to improve their houses or build new ones but could not afford to do so. Others had no wish to improve, either because they did not see the advantage of improving and therefore had no motivation to change, or because they had consciously chosen continuity due to the importance of the house in their agricultural practices.

The inter-war years saw gradual changes in the society and culture of the people. More 'ready money' was in use in the island throughout most of this period. Immediately after the First World War, many islanders found employment through Leverhulme's various schemes. During the 1920s, unemployment benefit helped those who were unable to find work in the now less-prosperous fishing industry or in domestic service, and the RNR retainer also added to the income of most families. During the 1930s, the Harris Tweed industry provided employment for many of the

island's men. Communications both within and to and from the island improved and, towards the end of the 1930s, radio was introduced. In effect, this period saw the continuing integration of the island and its people into the modern British way of life.

Whereas the pre-First World War years were characterised by gradual improvement, despite a generally reluctant population, the inter-war years were characterised by a growing desire for change which showed itself to a certain extent in the construction of new houses, and in the improvement of traditional housing. The movement of the hearth from the centre of the floor to a partition wall might be seen as a significant symbol of the change in attitude towards housing improvement amongst the population in general.

Throughout the post-Second World War period, the standard of living in Lewis continued to aspire to that of the mainland. The enculturation of the island into a cash economy became evident in a decline in the cultivation of land and a rise in sheep-stock. Improved communications and entertainments served to further connect the rural with the urban. As the perception of amenities changed from their being desirable to being necessary, so too did the desire for modern housing. House building took off with the introduction of government grants in the late 1940s and early 1950s and, of the old houses that remained inhabited, many were modernised to include whatever modern conveniences were possible, including electricity and factory-made furniture.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the emulation of an urban way of life dominated the motivation to change, and emulation of relatives and neighbours dominated the spread of change throughout the island. The authorities encouraged improvement in whatever way they saw fit. However change in the twentieth century, particularly after the First World War, was characterised not so much by the authorities' desire to implement change, as had occurred in the previous century, but by the people's willingness to embrace change.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the development of housing in Lewis throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries within its social and cultural context, looking at the process of, and the motivations for, housing change and continuity from the point of view of both the tenants and those in authority.

To begin with, the thesis examined the concept of vernacular architecture, and the supposition that society and culture are the most important determining factors in the design of vernacular buildings (Chapter 1). This supposition was supported in a number of cases, and examples were given of ways in which society and culture can influence vernacular architecture. 'Society' and 'culture' were defined as representing, respectively, the outer and the inner worlds of a people. The concept of '*genre de vie*' was then put forward as being a useful way to refer to the combined influences of society and culture in contrast to those of environment when discussing vernacular architecture, and it was suggested that vernacular architecture can, in fact, be seen as a physical manifestation of *genre de vie*. The benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to this research were also discussed, drawing on support from a number of previous studies of vernacular architecture from a variety of disciplines. An examination of the available source material for this project confirmed that an interdisciplinary approach was viable for the research to be undertaken.

Chapter 2 introduced and explained the methodology that was used in this investigation of housing change in Lewis, which was shown to encompass the collation and analysis of physical evidence, the collection of oral evidence, and the use of a wide variety of written sources. The township of Bragar was introduced, the development of the township from the pre-lotting settlement to the present township layout was discussed, and the importance of examining the shifting settlement patterns was highlighted. The methodology involved in the collection of the physical and oral material was also discussed, and a number of the more important written sources were introduced. Physical data would be represented by scaled plans of

forty-one vernacular houses within the Bragar township, along with a selection of photographs of vernacular houses from Bragar and from elsewhere in Lewis, particularly the West Side and Ness. The method of analysis of the house plans was introduced, based on a sequence of five chronological time phases, beginning with the pre-lotting settlement (Phase 1) and ending with houses built between 1895 and 1965 (Phase 5).

Chapter 3 examined the nature of change in vernacular architecture, looking at motivations for change (necessity and advantage) and at the process of change, whereby change occurs through diffusion, innovation, or invention. Such change is generally introduced by an individual within the community. It then becomes more widely accepted and imitated until it reaches a position where it eventually becomes integrated into the collective *genre de vie*. The nature of continuity was also discussed and it was proposed that there were two forms of continuity in material culture: 'conscious continuity' and 'historical continuity'. It was also shown that change and continuity are not mutually exclusive. An individual's personal 'repertoire' (i.e. their previous choices and experiences) was also discussed as being a leading factor in the acceptance or rejection of change.

There are a number of ways in which change can manifest in vernacular architecture. For ease of description in the course of this thesis, it was suggested that all changes in vernacular architecture can be classified under one, or more, of four general headings: Fabric, Features, Furnishings, and Function. Chapter 3 then continued by examining the history of vernacular architecture in Lewis and throughout Northern and Western Scotland. It was shown that vernacular architecture in this area was constantly changing and that there was diversity in building traditions even over relatively short distances. These changes and diversities resulted from both environmental and socio-cultural influences. It was also shown that, in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, architectural diversity existed within the Hebrides as housing developed differently in different islands.

Chapter 4 introduced the pre-lotting houses and settlements in Bragar, as they stood at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and placed them in the socio-cultural context of late eighteenth/early nineteenth century Lewis. The physical attributes of the houses were described and the pre-lotting houses were shown to have been influenced by both environmental and socio-cultural factors. It was shown that while some elements of the house, for example the wall construction, were environmentally advantageous, some elements, such as the housing of the cattle under the same roof as the tenants, had both environmental and socio-cultural significance.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 examined the development of housing and settlement in Lewis throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, within the context of a changing *genre de vie*. This was achieved by examining the role of those in authority, and their motivation to implement settlement and housing change, while also discussing the types of changes and the methods utilised to implement them. The thesis then examined the attitudes of the tenants to these changes, their motivations for accepting or rejecting change, and the processes through which change was adopted or rejected. In these various discussions, the thesis identified those changes in *genre de vie* which were relevant to the changing attitudes, motivations and processes that were involved in the development of housing in Lewis during this period. Housing and settlement changes which occurred throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were discussed throughout Chapters 5, 6, and 7, using physical evidence in the form of house plans from the township of Bragar, and photographs from throughout the districts of Barvas and Ness.

Principal Conclusions

Having looked chronologically at the processes and motivations of housing change, on the part of both tenants and those in authority, and at the types of changes that occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a number of principal conclusions can now be drawn. These are firstly summarised and are discussed in more detail below.

1. Two distinct *genres de vie* were operating in Lewis during the nineteenth century – that of the tenants and that of those in authority. As both groups were informed by their own *genre de vie*, their perspectives on the standards of living and values enjoyed by the tenants differed. This then paved the way for the conflict of interests between these two groups with regard to housing changes.
2. The motivations of those in authority changed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as did the processes through which they attempted to implement change.
3. During the nineteenth century, the tenants saw fit to accept settlement change, but to reject housing change.
4. The tenants' reluctance to implement housing change was not significantly affected by the introduction, in 1886, of security of tenure, a fixed fair rent, and adequate compensation for improvements.
5. The adoption of housing change was by no means uniform throughout the island during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While changes were adopted in some areas, continuities predominated in others.
6. The tenants' adoption of housing change was a result of changes in their *genre de vie*, and, in particular, the changing role of women in Lewis society and the increase in disposable income. Changes were adopted primarily through processes of external and internal diffusion although adaptations were also made through a process of innovation.
7. The housing changes which occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be chronologically sequenced, and it can be seen that, generally, changes in Function were followed by changes in Features, which were in turn followed by changes in Furnishings.

1. Tenants vs. Those in Authority

It can be seen from the outset that there was more than one *genre de vie* operating in Lewis during the nineteenth century, as the social and cultural background of those in authority (both proprietors and governmental bodies) differed considerably from that of the tenants. This resulted in a difference of perspectives with regard to the way of life and standard of living enjoyed by the tenants. The tenants' beliefs and

values, and their standards of living, were informed by their own *genre de vie* and were therefore acceptable to them. The *genre de vie* of those in authority, however, allowed the proprietors and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the local authorities, to assess the tenants' *genre de vie* as being 'below standard' and in need of 'improvement'. Such beliefs about 'betterment', and their own position of authority, encouraged proprietors and local authorities to enforce their beliefs about how the tenants should be living, albeit with little immediate success.

During the twentieth century, the boundaries between these two *genres de vie* weakened as responsibility for local administration changed from the proprietors to the 'local authorities', and as the tenants became increasingly assimilated into a monetary economy and came to enjoy a standard of living similar to that in mainland towns and cities. This will be discussed further below.

2. The Role of Those in Authority

The motivations of those in authority changed during this two hundred year period, as did the processes through which they attempted to implement change. The motivations of the proprietors for introducing housing and settlement change in the nineteenth century were those of social and cultural reform, resulting from the belief that the tenants' *genre de vie* was inferior, and that the tenants would benefit from civilising. These motivations for housing change gave way, in 1889, to those of the local authorities which focussed on improved health and sanitation. The method chosen to implement change by both proprietors and local authorities in the late nineteenth century was that of legislation, whereby tenants were instructed how to build their houses through Articles of Set, Rules and Regulations, and bye-laws. None of this legislation was effectively enforced, however, and in the early twentieth century, local authorities began to use education as a method of encouraging people to implement housing change, in order to improve their own sanitary conditions. Throughout this period, the local authorities, and to a lesser extent the proprietors, also relied heavily on underlying changes in the *genre de vie* of the island community to itself encourage the desire for improved housing among the people.

3. Settlement Change vs. Housing Change

During the nineteenth century, tenants saw fit to accept settlement change, but to reject housing change. The information presented in Chapters 5 and 6 has shown that tenants most likely accepted settlement change because, if they had resisted, they would have risked eviction. Land was the most important material commodity in the eyes of the tenants, as without it they had no means of supporting themselves or their families. They therefore saw acceptance of settlement change as a necessity, brought about by external force, through the threat of eviction. In the matter of housing, however, change was not seen by tenants as being necessary, nor was it perceived to be materially, socially, or environmentally advantageous.

Although this thesis has shown that the farming practices of the tenants may not have changed considerably after the first lotting, as tenants still worked their own plot of land and certain activities continued to be carried out in common, the process of lotting broke up individual joint-farm communities and imposed a new spatial order on the layout of the settlement. This, in turn, affected the structure of the community and reinforced the implementation of a new social order which favoured individualism over community. It was shown that this method of using spatial order to implement social control has also been used by colonialists in other areas of the world and that the desire for spatial order was ultimately a product of Enlightenment thought.

The thesis has also shown that the purpose of settlement change differed from that of housing change. While settlement change was primarily instigated to benefit the proprietors, housing change (for example, the introduction of partitions) was primarily intended to benefit the tenants. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the proprietors to impose measures in the implementation of housing change that would be to the obvious detriment of the tenants. While settlement change could be enforced with the threat of eviction, housing change could only be dealt with much less strictly, with the consequence that tenants were generally able to reject the attempts of those in authority at imposing housing change.

The tenants' rejection of housing change was the result of a number of factors. Firstly, as change was not being enforced, it was not seen by the tenants as being a necessity. Secondly, while the proprietors believed the desired changes to be materially and socially advantageous, such changes were, from the perspective of the tenants, materially and socially disadvantageous and went against their social and cultural beliefs, practices, and values. In other words, the changes suggested by the proprietors were not compatible with the tenants' current *genre de vie*. Many changes were also environmentally disadvantageous, such as the introduction of a second door or the introduction of windows. Tenants may also have rejected housing change as it would have resulted in a change in their routine practices and relationships within the house. As the built environment is not only created by *genre de vie*, but also itself plays an active role in the creation and sustainment of *genre de vie*, any enforced change within the built environment would result in the restructuring of the *genre de vie*. This might then lead to a period of dissonance during which the hearts and minds of the people struggle to catch up with the enforced changes in *genre de vie*. In particular, housing change may have been resisted because the house had taken on a more important role in the structuring of the community after the first lotting, or simply because such changes were deemed by tenants as being too intrusive and literally 'too close to home'.

The failure of the Lewis local authorities to implement change where other island and mainland authorities had been successful may have been partly due to the size of the island and the scattered and congested nature of its settlements. It may also have been the case that tenants elsewhere were less opposed to housing change than were the Lewis tenants. This may have been the case due to differences in population, agricultural practices, and sources of income. Without further study, however, this question cannot be answered definitively.

4. The Crofters Act, 1886

The tenants' reluctance to implement housing change was not significantly affected by the introduction, in 1886, of security of tenure, a fixed fair rent, and adequate compensation for improvements. While such legislation may have removed certain

barriers to improvement and may have encouraged some tenants to improve, it has been shown that many tenants who were outside the remit of such legislation chose to improve their houses, or to build improved houses, and that many of those tenants who were covered by such legislation, still rejected housing change. The thesis has also shown that some tenants may have used the lack of such legislation as an excuse for not improving their houses rather than admitting that they had no desire to improve.

5. Diversity and Continuity

This thesis has shown that housing change began to be adopted by tenants in some areas of Lewis as early as the 1870s, and that this trend continued and escalated throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as transport and communications improved and as rural Lewis was drawn more and more into a monetary economy. It has also been shown that housing change was by no means uniform throughout the island (although there does seem to have been more uniformity within townships than between them), and that, even in the mid-to-late twentieth century, a great deal of diversity existed throughout the island. For example, windows were generally adopted in Crossbost, but did not become common in Bragar. Also, some houses retained the central hearth while others adopted the hobble. The historical continuities of the early-to-mid-nineteenth century therefore gave way, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to a more conscious form of continuity whereby some tenants actively chose to continue with certain housing elements (e.g. the central hearth or windowless walls) as they rejected the introduction of new elements. The existence of certain housing continuities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also goes some way towards showing that the introduction of housing change was an individual affair and that changes were adopted or rejected to suit the needs and desires of each family.

6. The Process of Change

It is the nature of *genre de vie* that it is continuously changing. However, a number of significant developments occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two of the most important, in relation to housing change in Lewis during this period,

were an increase in the islanders' disposable income and an increase in the amount of time they spent off the island. Since the mid-nineteenth century, men in Lewis had been following the seasonal herring fishing to supplement their livelihood at home. During this time, there is evidence that a greater number of imported materials – such as foodstuffs and clothing – became commonplace. From the 1870s and 1880s onwards, young, unmarried women joined the men-folk at the fishing, while others went to work in cities, such as Glasgow, as domestic servants. Many families also had relatives who had emigrated to Canada in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and who frequently sent money to their families back in Lewis. These social changes had two effects. Firstly, they increased the disposable income of the average family. Secondly, they allowed the women to see a different way of life than they were used to in Lewis.

Women, in particular, played an important part in the introduction of certain housing changes and their role in the implementation and spread of change should not be underestimated. Changes such as the introduction of wallpaper and the movement, and subsequent decoration, of the hearth were primarily a result of the women's desire to emulate certain aspects of the *genre de vie* which they had experienced on the mainland. When the women returned home, either from the seasonal herring fishing or from domestic service, changes were introduced through a process of external diffusion as the women sought to emulate the types of houses they had known outside of the island. It was also found that men who had returned to Lewis after emigrating began to desire improved housing. Changes then spread by a process of internal diffusion, particularly within townships, as tenants sought to improve their houses as their neighbours had done. However, while changes were adopted by a process of emulation, this was not to the exclusion of innovation. Using the materials they had, tenants adapted the desired changes to fit into their existing *genre de vie*. The movement of the hearth, for example, and the creation of a chimney in the living area, was initially adapted to suit the islanders' need for soot-filled thatch and their beliefs about the heat-giving powers of smoke.

As the tenants' *genre de vie* changed, housing changes that had previously not been materially or socially advantageous now became perceived as such and, in some cases (such as sewerage), even necessary. Some changes may have been adopted purely for social advantage, such as the gable-end chimney and the elaborate external 'stair', while others were more materially advantageous, such as the shelf built into the hobble wall. During the twentieth century, improvements in transport and communications, emigration, the islanders' involvement in the two world wars, their increasing enculturation into a monetary economy (particularly with the success of the Harris Tweed industry), and a decline in crop cultivation and in cattle rearing, all combined to widen the islanders' social and cultural horizons, changing their *genre de vie* and thus their attitude towards housing change.

7. The Pattern of Change

This thesis has also sought to examine the types of housing changes that were introduced during this two hundred year period, using physical, oral, and written evidence. The physical evidence portrayed in the house plans shows that, throughout the nineteenth century, changes were taking place in the Function of the houses. By examining a selection of house plans from different time periods, it has been shown that the byre-dwelling unit increases in size between Phases 2 and 3, as does the *fosglan*, where there is one. The *taigh-fhuaraich* ('cold room' or 'upper room') also seems to disappear during this time, and rather than increasing the number of rooms in the house by building extensions, the existing rooms become partitioned and divided, which mirrors the development of the house in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards (Rybczynski 1987). In some Phase 4 and 5 houses, the external *fosglan* is replaced by an internal passage way, formed between the byre and the living area, to create a space where peat and water could be stored. During the twentieth century, evidence from informants suggests that houses were being continually adapted, to suit the needs of the family.

Written and oral evidence suggests that the main housing changes adopted by tenants in Lewis may be placed chronologically as follows: (1) the introduction of box-beds, (2) the introduction of a timber partition between the sleeping area and the living

area, (3) the introduction of a timber partition between the living area and the byre, (4) the introduction of a window or windows in the living or sleeping areas, (5) the introduction of wallpaper and ornaments, (6) the introduction of a gable chimney, (7) the movement of the hearth to a stone partition wall and the subsequent development of the hobble into an enclosed chimney flue which extended through the thatch, (8) the further spread of wallpaper and the introduction of more advanced interior decoration, such as the use of whiting and the introduction of a mantelpiece, (9) the introduction of factory-made furniture, and (10) the introduction of electricity. New materials were also introduced, such as roofing felt and concrete, and these were adapted to suit the houses and the needs of the people. There seems to be some, although no precise, general pattern in the types of housing change introduced, with changes in housing Function (room size and partitions) generally being followed by changing Features (windows and hearth), and then changing Furnishings (décor and furniture). It can be seen that changes in Furnishings were mainly instigated by women. Changes in the Fabric of the house (walls, roof and floor) occurred later, if at all.

Summary

In order to motivate material change, there has to be a perceived social, cultural, or environmental necessity or advantage to implementing it. Although that motivation was present in the society and culture of those in authority, it was completely absent in the society and culture of the people, during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was this, I believe, that was at the heart of the tension between the tenants and those in authority on the issue of improved housing. Until the society and culture of the people had altered so that material change became either necessary or advantageous, the tenants would not willingly instigate change. In this way, the required changes could not have been satisfactorily adopted in Lewis until the society, and in particular the agricultural practices, had changed, such that the cattle were no longer of primary importance, the thatch was no longer needed for fertilizer, and perhaps most importantly of all, the culture of the people had adapted to this new

society. Housing change was slow to be accepted by the tenants because it was incompatible with their *genre de vie* at that time.

Until the end of the 19th century, the authorities responsible for housing improvement in Lewis, and throughout Scotland, were the landowners. Their methods of improvement involved the imposition of their beliefs about how the tenants should live, based on their own social and cultural standards and values, on a people with a completely different social and cultural background. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, with the responsibility for housing improvement now firmly in the hands of various governmental bodies, educating rather than civilising became the order of the day, with tenants no longer being cajoled, and instead being educated, into a 'better' way of life. This was aided by increased income on the part of the tenants, and more particularly, by their broadening social horizons. When their society and culture began to change, it finally made housing change possible.

Contributions to the Field

This thesis has shown that much stands to be gained by examining the development of rural vernacular housing within its specific social and cultural contexts, and indeed that without such an examination, much valuable information will be lost. It has also shown that an interdisciplinary approach, using all available evidence, is necessary to gain as complete a picture as possible of housing and settlement history. This thesis therefore contributes not only to the study of housing and settlement history in Lewis, but may also provide a model for the study of housing and settlement history elsewhere in the Hebrides, in the Scottish Highlands, and further afield. This thesis has also shown that much information can be gleaned about the social and cultural history of the Lewis people by studying the development of their houses and that the house may indeed be seen, as Cooper Marcus (1997) puts it, 'as a mirror of self'.

Further Research

Much further research remains to be done in this field. A comparative study of two or more townships in areas with different social and cultural backgrounds would be a valuable companion to this thesis, showing the effect of socio-cultural change on the diversity of housing to be found between areas of differing *genres de vie*. It would also be interesting to carry out a study of Lewis houses built during the inter-war and post-war years, to see to what extent the socio-cultural values expressed through the vernacular houses were adopted in the new houses. More extensive comparisons might also be made between the Lewis houses and similar houses elsewhere in Britain and abroad, to gain an idea of the extent to which the Lewis houses developed along standard lines of 'modernisation', and the extent to which they may have developed independently. Much of the information I collected, from both written and oral sources, failed to find its way into this thesis as it fell outside the remit of the present research. This information is itself worthy of further research and publication. It is also important that as much information as possible is collected from oral sources before the older generation disappears.[110]

A's an Dealachadh (A Closing Word)

The vernacular houses of rural Lewis are a monument to a past *genre de vie*, and a tribute to the people who built and lived in them. Their study is both fulfilling and worthwhile and can only bring us closer to the lives of those who once inhabited them.

[110] I am sad to say that two of my informants have died since I began my research: Mr. Angus MacLeod of Calbost and Marybank died in October 2002, and Mr. Seòras MacLeòid of Dalmore died in February 2004. *A chuid a Phàrras dhaibh* (May they have their share of Paradise).

Gairm nan Tobhtaichean
le Dr. Fionnlagh MacLeòid

Tha ar làraich ghorm 'gad ghairm
Gus an toir thu luaidh le urram dhuinn
Mar a dèan thus' e co nì
Spealgaidh mi-run 's dochainn sinn;
Cha tog duin 'n àird' ar cliù
Gun diù leigear dhan talamh sinn
Cha bhith seirm no liut no muirn
Mar dèan thu còmhnaidh maille rinn.

Call of the Sites
by Dr. Finlay MacLeod

Our grassy home sites call you
To give a sound account of us
If you do not then who will
Ill-willed attack will plunder us;
With no-one to illuminate our story
Ignored we will become as earth
Denied accolade or skill or care
If you do not remain with us.

A' CHRÌOCH ~ THE END

Appendix 1

Glossary of Gaelic Terminology

Gaelic Terminology Used in the Thesis[111]

Gaelic	**English**
a' chòrr	the end-couple
acair, acraichean	anchor(s); stone(s) used to weight down ropes over the thatch
aig an teine	'at the fire'; the living area
am bàthach	the byre
an ceann shìos	the lower end (of the house)
an ceann shuas	the upper end (of the house)
an rùm	'the room'; often used to describe the sleeping area, which was often also the 'best room'
an sabhal	the barn
àth	kiln
being	bench
boinne a' rothaid	'road milk'; milk from Stornoway which was brought round the townships in grocers' vans.
bolt	wallpaper (Lewis)
brà	hand quern
cabair	side timbers
cabar-droma	the roof-tree
cailbh	timber partition wall
caithris na h-oidhche	night visiting – the practice whereby young men would visit their sweethearts in their homes during the night, and would spend the night in bed with them, fully clothed.
caschrom	type of foot-plough
ceangail	roof couples
cèilidh	gathering of friends and neighbours in someone's house
ciste	chest
clach an teinntein	hearth-stone
constabail baile	township constable
creaga	group of houses built close together or attached
criadh ghorm	blue clay, which was good for making floors
crùb, crùban	bed(s) built into the thickness of the wall

[111] A more comprehensive glossary of Gaelic housing terminology can be found in NicAoidh (2000).

cùil-ghlaiste 'locked-end'; room off the living area, from which is derived *cùlaist*

cùl an tallain behind the *tallan*

cùlaist sleeping area or 'best room'

danns' a' rothaid road dance, where youngsters would meet on the road and hold dances before there were village halls

doras a' staill door in the stone partition wall into the living area

dreasair dresser

dubh black

fallan see *tallan*

feannagan lazybeds

fiodh wood

fir baile see *fir taca*

fir taca tacksmen

fosglan 'porch'; room through which many houses were entered

fraighnich water coming through the walls of a house

fraigh-shnighe see *fraighnich*

hallan see *tallan*

leabaidh taobh an teine 'bed beside the fire'; bed in the living area

leabaidh-dùinte, leapannan-dùinte 'closed bed(s)'; box-bed(s)

leac an teinntein see *clach an teinntein*

machair sandy coastal plain

maide-doicheallach stick of inhospitality, placed across the open doorway to warn passers-by not to enter

maide-doichill see *maide-doicheallach*

maide-feannaig 'crow-stick'; extension to the end-couple round which the ropes are tied over the thatch

maide-fithich 'raven-stick', see *maide-feannaig*

maoir fearainn see *maoir-gruinnd*

maoir-gruinnd ground officers

monadh moor

roinn-oisinn corner-couple

sèis see *being*

sgrathan turves cut to place on top of the roof timbers, upon which the thatch is then laid

Siamarlan Chamberlain or Factor

Sìoman Thearlaich 'Charlie's Rope' (coir rope, named after the Stornoway merchant who first imported it)

sìoman, sìomanan rope(s) of heather or straw used to hold down the thatch, and weighted with *acraichean*

slabhraidh, slabhraidhean the pot-chain(s) which hung over the fire

snighe sooty water falling into the house from the thatch

stall edge between the living area and the byre

taigh house

taigh dubh black-house

taigh geal white-house

taigh tugha	thatched house (Tiree)
taigh tughaidh	thatched house
taigh-beirt	weaving shed
Taighean a' Bhùird	'Board Houses' or DAFS Houses – houses built with a grant or loan from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries or from the Board of Agriculture
taigh-falaich	hidden room
taigh-fhuaraich	cold room, entered from the living area
taigh-staile	still (for distilling whisky)
taigh-uachdarach	upper room, entered from the living area
taigh-uaraich	see *taigh-uachdarach*
talainte	see *tallan*
talan	see *tallan*
tallan	partition wall (often of timber)
taobhan àrd	upper purlin
taobhan ìosal	lower purlin
taobhanan	purlins
teine	fire
tigh dubh	see *taigh dubh*
tigh geal	see *taigh geal*
tighinn fodha	rising damp
tighinn thilge	see *fraighnich*
tobhta	the outer ledge of the wall-head
toll-dilidh	see *toll-lodain*
toll-each	hole created in the end wall of the byre when part of the wall was dismantled once a year to aid in clearing out the manure
toll-fasgnaidh	winnowing hole (in the barn)
toll-innireach	see *toll-each*
toll-lodain	hole through which the byre drain would exit the house
tughadh	thatch
uachdar an taighe	the room at the top end of the house; sleeping room or 'best room'
udabac	wall-hearting; porch; wall built in front of the main entrance doorway to protect it from the wind
ùireabac	see *udabac*
ùrlar dubh	'black floor'; clay floor

Appendix 2

Glossary of Names

Names of Townships and Districts in Lewis

English	***Gaelic***
Arivruach	*Airidh a Bhruaich*
Arnol	*Arnol*
Back	*Bac*
Balallan	*Baile Ailein*
Ballantrushal	*Baile an Truiseil*
Barvas	*Barabhas*
Borghastan	*Borghastan*
Bosta	*Bostadh*
Bragar	*Bràgair*
Calbost	*Calbost*
Callanish	*Calanais*
Carloway	*Càrlabhagh*
Cross	*Cros*
Crossbost	*Crosbost*
Dalbeg	*Dàil Beag*
Dalmore	*Dàil Mòr*
Dell	*Dàil*
Garenin	*Gearrannan*
Kirkibost	*Circebost*
Kneep	*Cnip*
Laxay	*Lacsaidh*
Leurbost	*Liurbost*
Lewis	*Leòdhas*
Lionel	*Lional*
Lochs	*Na Lochan*
Ness	*Nis*
North Tolsta	*Tolastadh bho Thuath*
Point	*An Rubha*
Shawbost	*Siabost*
Stornoway	*Steòrnabhagh*
Tolsta Chaolais	*Tolsta Chaolais*
Tong	*Tunga*
Uig	*Uig*
Valtos	*Bhaltos*
West Side	*An Taobh Siar*

Names of Roads and Areas in Bragar

Gaelic	**English**
A' Chùil	The Corner (between lots 23 and 27)
Rathad a' Bhrunail	Brunal Road
An t-Sràid	The Street
An t-Sràid bho Dheas	South Street
An t-Sràid bho Thuath	North Street

Names of Houses in Bragar

Gaelic	**English**
Taigh Bhaile Loch	The House at Baile Loch (Loch Town)
Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh	Kenneth Son of Rory's House
Taigh Iain Gobha	Ian Smith's House
Taigh na Banntraich	The Widow's House
Taigh nan Gobhaichean	The Smiths' House
Taigh na Sràide bho Thuath	North Street House

Other Names Used in the Thesis

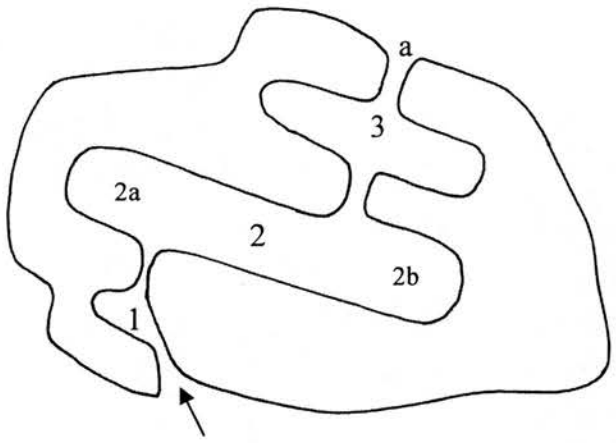
Gaelic	**English**
Comuinn Eachdraidh	Historical Societies
Comann Eachdraidh an Taobh Siar	West Side Historical Society
Comunn Eachdraidh Nis	Ness Historical Society

Appendix 3

Bragar House Plans

(1:250)

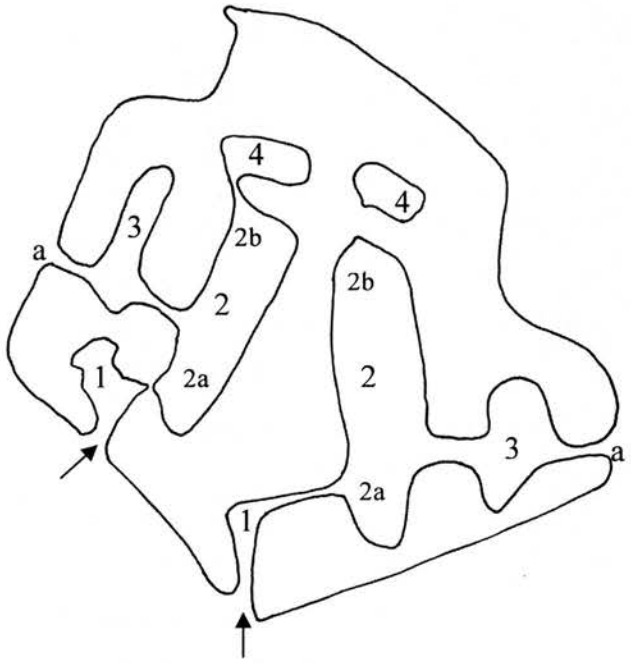
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 1**



1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. barn

a. winnowing hole or low door

Gàsig (a) [G(a)]
Originally surveyed for the Bragar Townships Project (Banks and Atkinson 2000).



Two houses sharing a common wall.

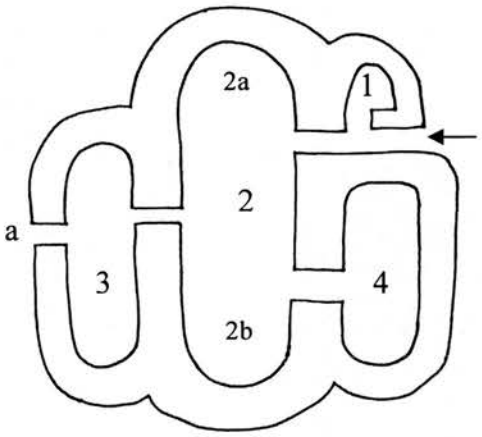
Each house contains:

1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. barn
4. *taigh-fhuaraich*

a. winnowing hole or low door

Gàsig (b) [G(b)]
Originally surveyed for the Bragar Townships Project (Banks and Atkinson 2000).

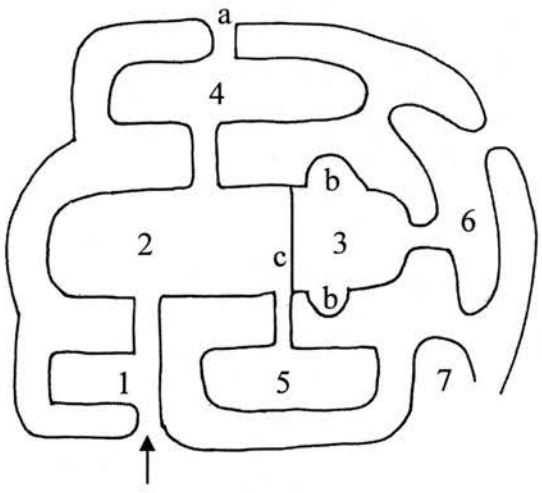
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 1**



1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. barn
4. *taigh-fhuaraich*

a. winnowing hole or low door

Taigh Bhaile Loch [TBL]

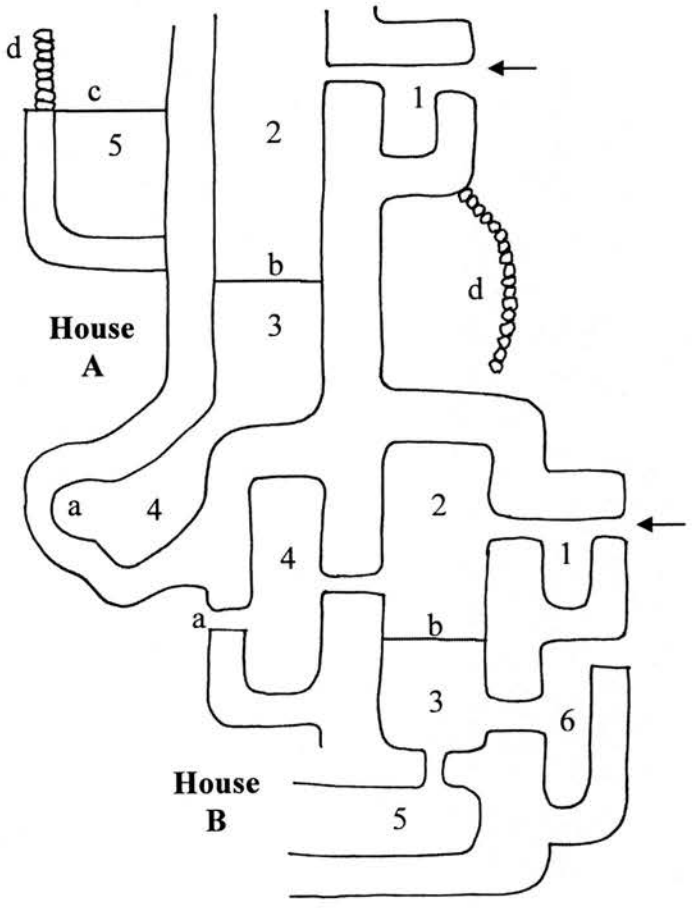


1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn
5. *taigh-fhuaraich*
6. possibly a kiln or still
7. possibly a *taigh-falaich*

a. winnowing hole or low door
b. *crùb*
c. step up to living area

Taigh Choinnich Mhic Ruairidh (Kenneth Son of Rory's House) [TCMR]
Surveyed and published in Roussell (1934: 22).

SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 1**



Two houses sharing a common wall.

House A contains:

1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. *taigh-fhuaraich*
5. possibly a barn

a. possibly a *crùb*
b. step up to living area
c. step up to 5
d. low wall of single stones

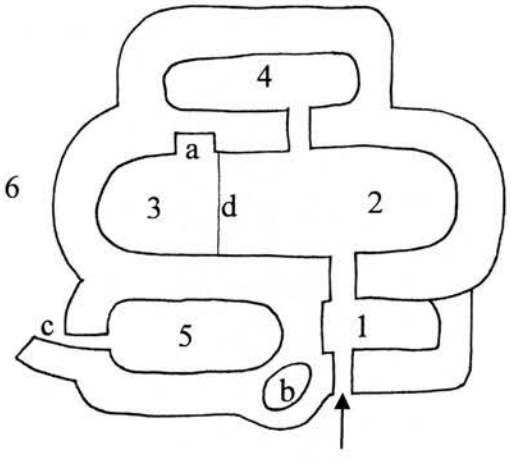
House B contains:

1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn
5. *taigh-fhuaraich*
6. possibly a *taigh-fhuaraich*, it is unclear whether the external door was an original feature

a. winnowing hole or low door
b. step up to living area

Taigh nan Gobhaichean (Smiths' House) [TnG]

SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 1**

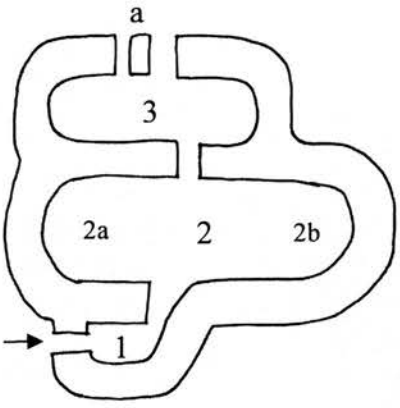


1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn
5. possibly another barn
6. remains of walling suggests this area may have been a stack-yard (*iolann*)

a. possible ground level alcove
b. the corner of the wall bulges somewhat and the outline of an oval depression is clearly visible at the corner, it may simply be the result of fallen rubble
c. doorway, possibly leading into stack-yard
d. possible step up to living area

Taigh na Sràide bho Thuath (a) (North Street House (a)) [TST(a)]

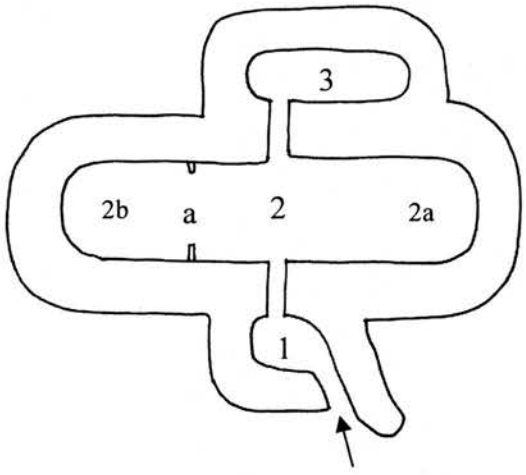
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 2**



1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. barn

a. possibly a door and a winnowing hole

Taigh na Sràide bho Thuath (b) (North Street House (b)) [TST(b)]



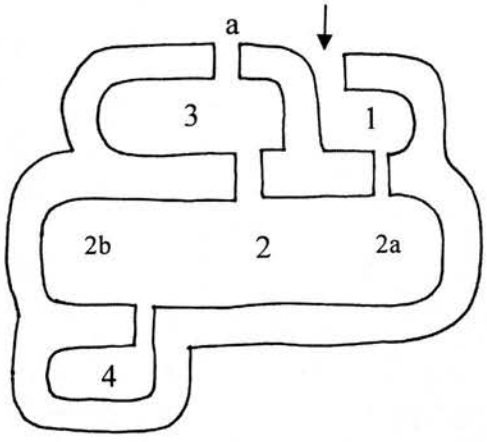
1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. barn

a. two stones, possibly marking the boundary between the byre and the living area

Note: Byre-dwelling floor slopes downwards towards the byre-end.

Taigh na Sràide bho Thuath (c) (North Street House (c)) [TST(c)]

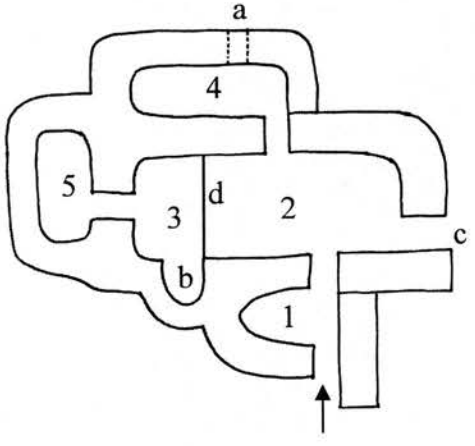
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 2**



1. *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. barn
4. *taigh-fhuaraich*

a. winnowing hole or low doorway

Taigh Iain Gobha (Ian Smith's House) [TIG]

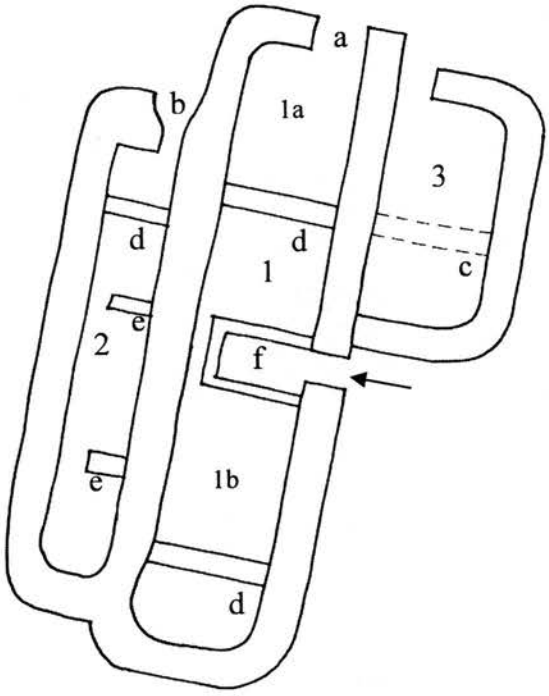


1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn
5. *taigh-fhuaraich*

a. winnowing hole
b. *crùb*
c. doorway in end wall of byre (probably a later addition)
d. step up to living area

Taigh na Banntraich (Widow's House) [TnB]

SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 3**

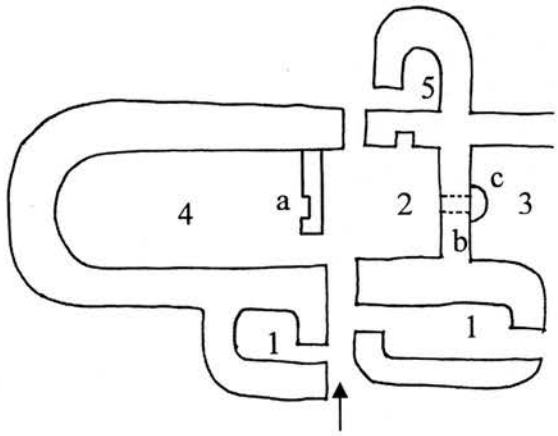


1. byre-dwelling
1a. byre-end
1b. living-end
2. possibly a barn
3. purpose of unit unclear, possibly a later addition

a. door, and possible *toll-each*, in end-wall of byre
b. doorway
c. remains of what may have been a wall, presumably a later addition
d. wall, later addition
e. wall, may or may not have been an original feature
f. sheep dip enclosure, constructed after the building was abandoned as a home

Note: Byre-dwelling floor slopes downwards towards the byre-end.

House 12



1. *fosglan*
2. unclear whether this was originally the byre or whether it formed part of the living area.
3. unclear whether this was originally the byre or whether it was originally outside of the byre, the ground level of this area is around 80cm lower than that of area 2.
4. living area
5. remains of a barn which stood here (Inf. N)

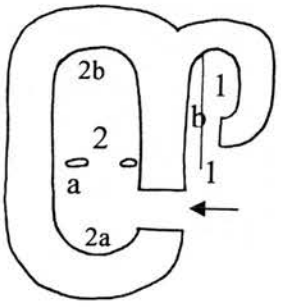
a. hobble wall
b. ground level opening, 65cm high
c. small semi-circular raised area bridging the 80cm difference in floor level

House 16(a)

SCALE 1:250

North

PHASE 3



1. small *fosglan* or barn
2. byre-dwelling

2a. byre-end

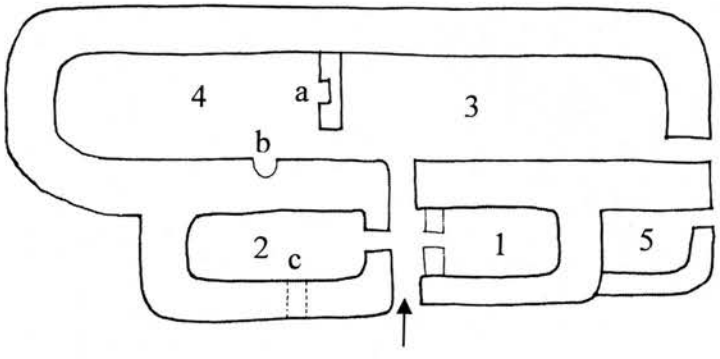
2b. living-end

a. two single stones, possibly marking the boundary between the byre and the living area.

b. single skinned stone wall built against the common wall, possibly added during repairs

House 16(b)

Note: Very small house, possibly built for an elderly relative.



1. *fosglan*
2. *fosglan*, possibly used for winnowing (see c.)
3. byre
4. living-area
5. hen house

a. hobble wall

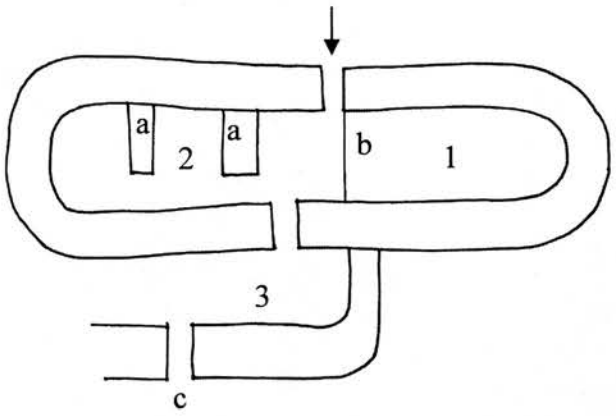
b. ground level alcove

c. 55cm high hole, possibly used for winnowing

House 19(a)

Note: This house had a separate barn (Inf. E).

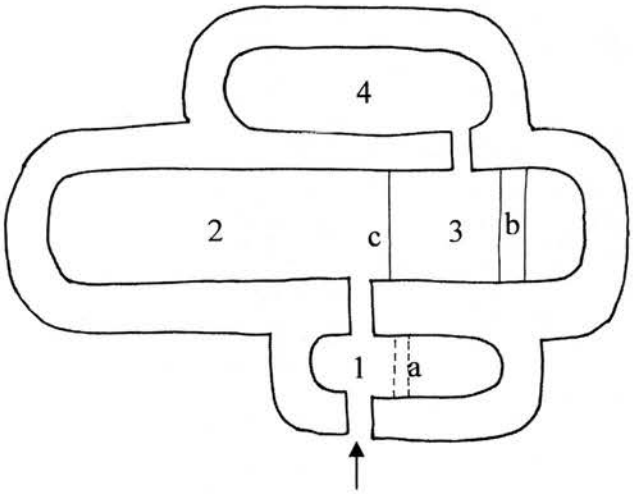
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 3**



1. byre
2. living area
3. barn

a. walls, may or may not be original features
b. step up to living area
c. low door or winnowing hole

House 26(b)

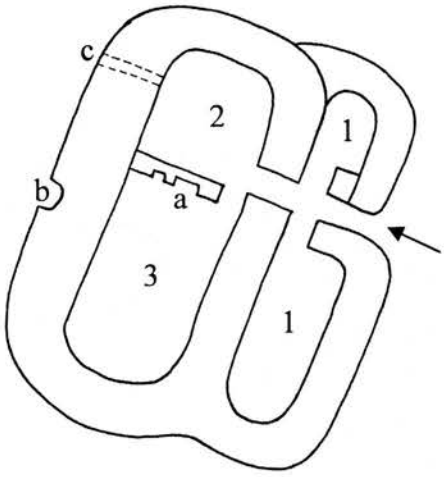


1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

a. outline of a wall, possibly a later addition, or it may have been an original feature containing a doorway
b. wall, later addition
c. step up to living area

House 27(b)

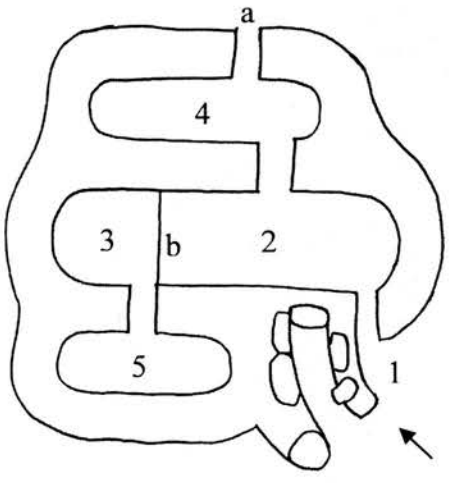
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 3**



1. *fosglan*, may also have been used as a barn
2. byre
3. living area

a. hobble wall with shelf
b. ground level alcove in living area of an attached house which is no longer extant
c. *toll-lodain*

House 35



1. unclear exactly where the entrance would have been (see Note)
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn
5. *taigh-fhuaraich*

a. winnowing hole or low door
b. step up to living area

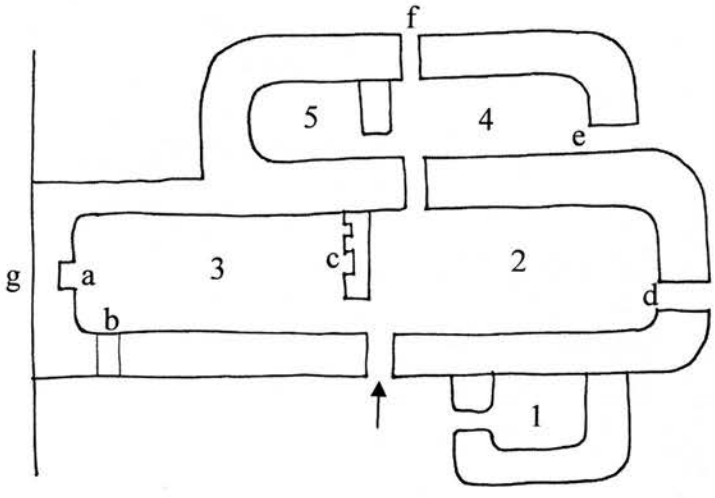
Note: Many of the walls of this house are only an outline in the grass and there is a lot of fallen rubble. The entrance-way, in particular, is difficult to make out.

House 49(b)

SCALE 1:250

North

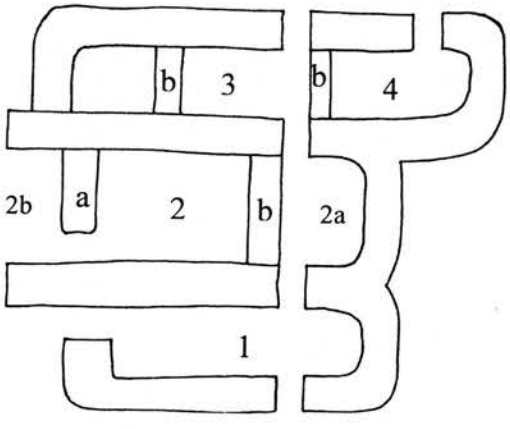
PHASE 4



House 4

1. small house built for the *othaisgean* (1 year old ewes) who would often be kept indoors during lambing; this room was later used to house a loom (Inf. B)
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn and stable
5. barn

a. enclosed chimney
b. window
c. hobble wall with shelf
d. doorway in end-wall of byre
e. doorway in end wall of barn/stable
f. low doorway into the stack-yard
g. modern garage built onto the end wall of the house



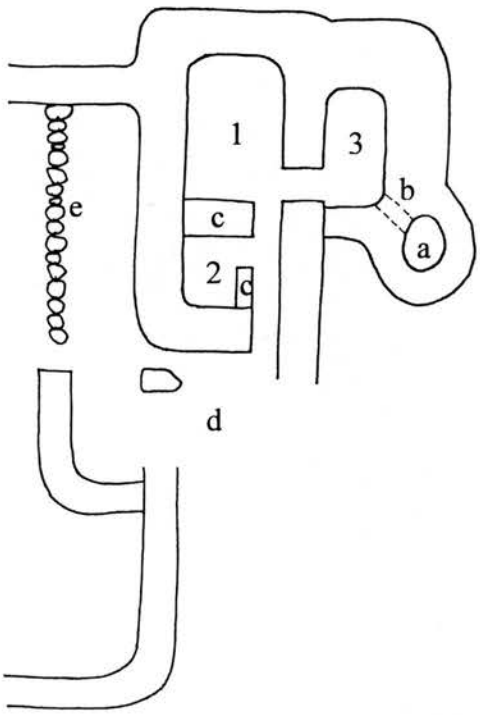
House 5(a)

1. possibly the *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. probably the byre-end
2b. probably the living-end
3. possibly the barn
4. originally part of 3

a. possibly a hobble wall
b. wall, added at some point after the house was built

Note: The original layout of this building and the original entry point are unclear. The central unit would have been the byre-dwelling unit, with the barn on one side and the *fosglan* on the other side. It is perhaps more likely that unit 1 was the fosglan as the entrance would then have been from the south rather than from the north.

SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 4**

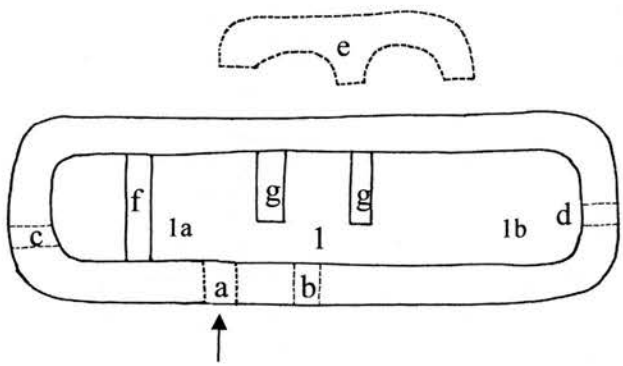


House 5(b)

1. possibly the living area
2. possibly part of the living area or perhaps part of the byre
3. possibly a *taigh-fhuaraich*

a. similar to feature b in TST(a): the corner of the wall bulges somewhat and the outline of an oval depression is clearly visible at the corner, it may simply be the result of fallen rubble
b. possible opening in the wall
c. these two walls were probably later additions
d. unclear what happens in this area
e. single row of stones

Note: Very little remains of this house, making the original layout difficult to ascertain.



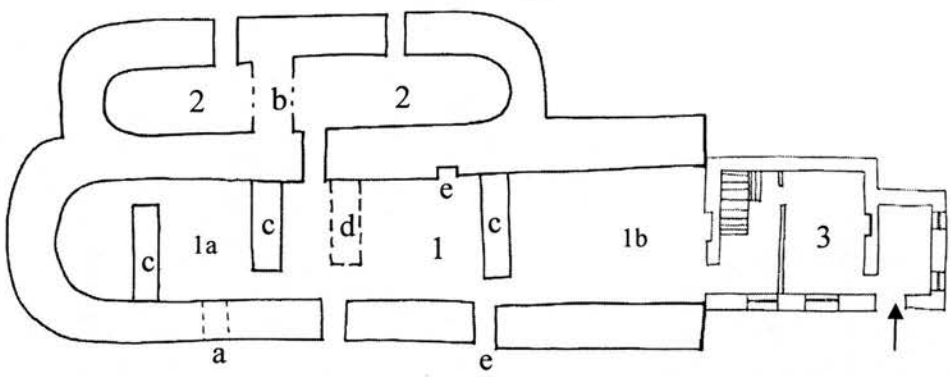
House 6(b)

1. byre-dwelling
1a. byre-end
1b. living-end

a. blocked up door
b. possibly a door
c. possibly a door
d. probably a window
e. faint outline in grass, probably the remains of a previous building
f. wall, later addition
g. wall, possibly a later additions

Note: The original doorway at a may have been moved to b, and the doorway at c opened at that time.

SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 4**

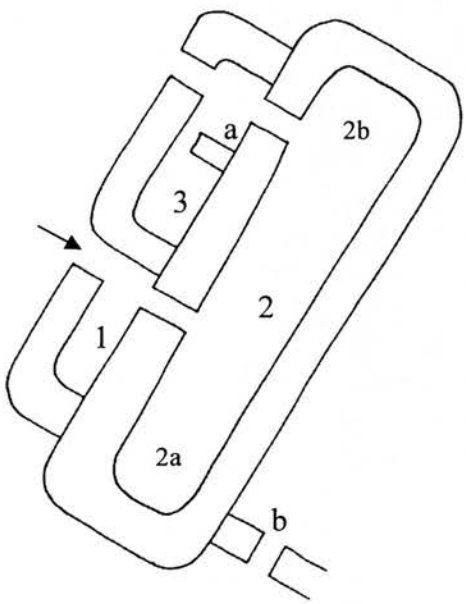


House 9

1. byre-dwelling
1a. byre-end
1b. living-end
2. *fosglan* or barn
3. new concrete dwelling-house

a. possibly a doorway
b. this wall may have contained a doorway
c. wall, possibly a later addition
d. outline of wall, possibly a later addition
e. small ground level alcove

Note: The primary entrance to the old house is unclear.

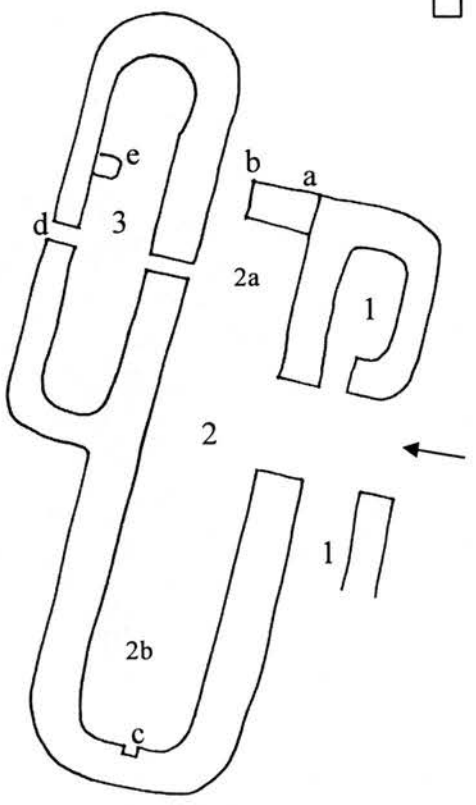


1. probably the *fosglan*
2. byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. probably a barn

a. this may or may not have been an original wall
b. possibly part of a wall enclosing a stack-yard

House 11

SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 4**

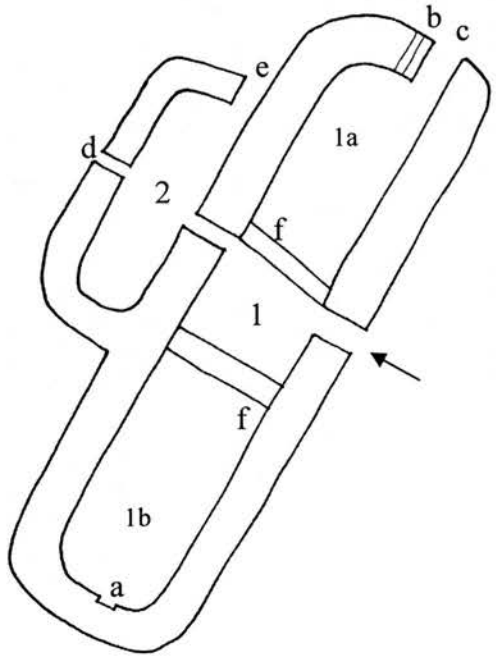


1. *fosglan*
2.byre-dwelling
2a. byre-end
2b. living-end
3. barn

a. *toll-each*
b. doorway in end-wall of byre
c. enclosed chimney
d. winnowing hole
e. wall, possibly a later addition

Note: The entrance has been widened since the building was abandoned as a house.

House 13



1. byre-dwelling
1a. byre-end
1b. living-end
2. barn

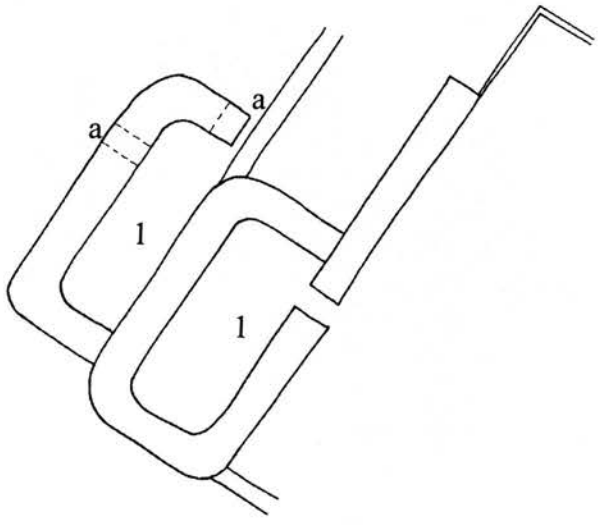
a. enclosed chimney
b. *toll-lodain*
c. door in end-wall of byre
d. winnowing hole
e. door in end wall of barn
f. wall, later addition

House 14(a)

SCALE 1:250

North

PHASE 4

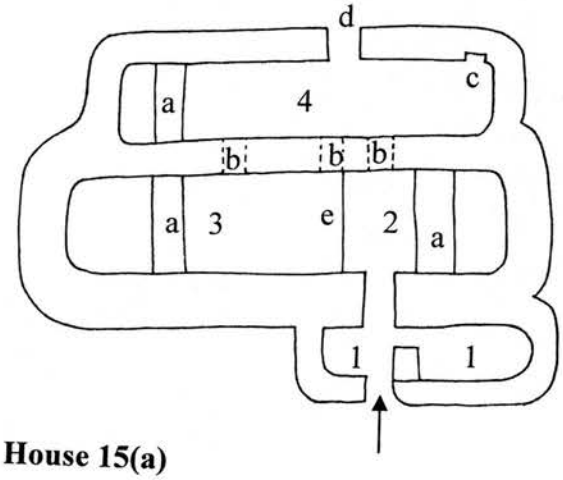


1. unclear what this unit was

a. possible opening in the wall

Note: Very little remains of this house and it is impossible to determine its original layout or where the primary entrance was.

House 14(b)

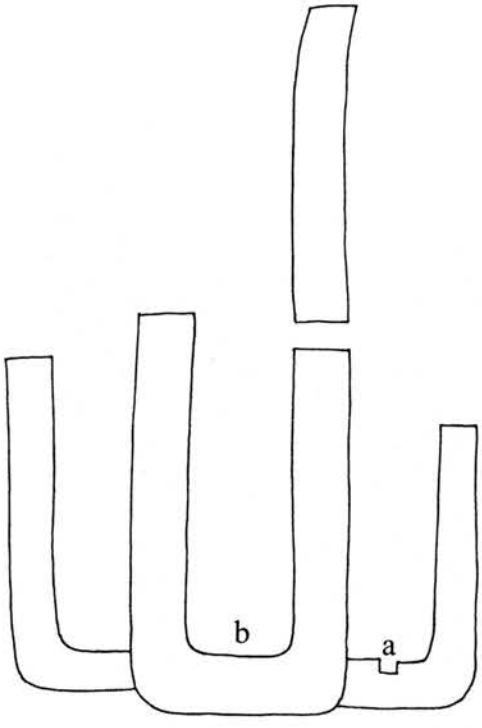


1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

a. wall, late addition, possibly introduced to shorten the room
b. blocked up doorway
c. small ground level alcove, now bricked up
d. winnowing hole or low doorway
e. step up to living area

House 15(a)

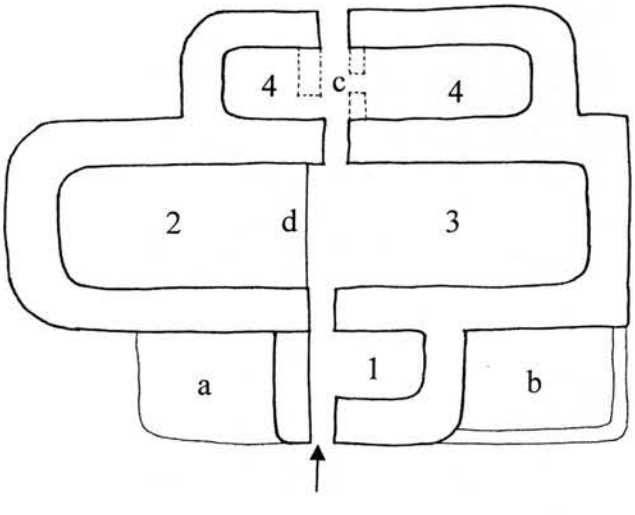
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 4**



a. 65cm high ground level alcove, now blocked, it was possibly a chimney although no flue is now visible from above
b. the walls at this end of the building have been coated in a layer of cement; it is unclear whether this was done while the house was still lived in.

Note: It is difficult to determine the original layout of this house from the physical remains. The floor slopes upwards to the south, suggesting that the northern end of the house was the byre-end.

House 18



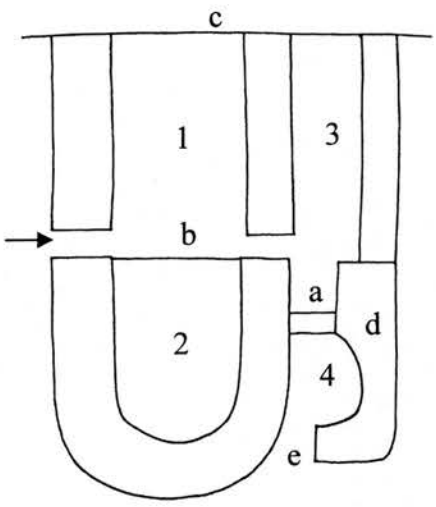
1. probably the *fosglan*, possibly a barn
2. byre
3. living area
4. probably a barn, possibly the *fosglan*

a. raised area
b. raised area enclosed by row of stones
c. vague outline of walls
d. step up to living area

Note: The primary entrance is more likely to have been through unit 1, from the south, than through unit 4, from the north.

House 19(b)

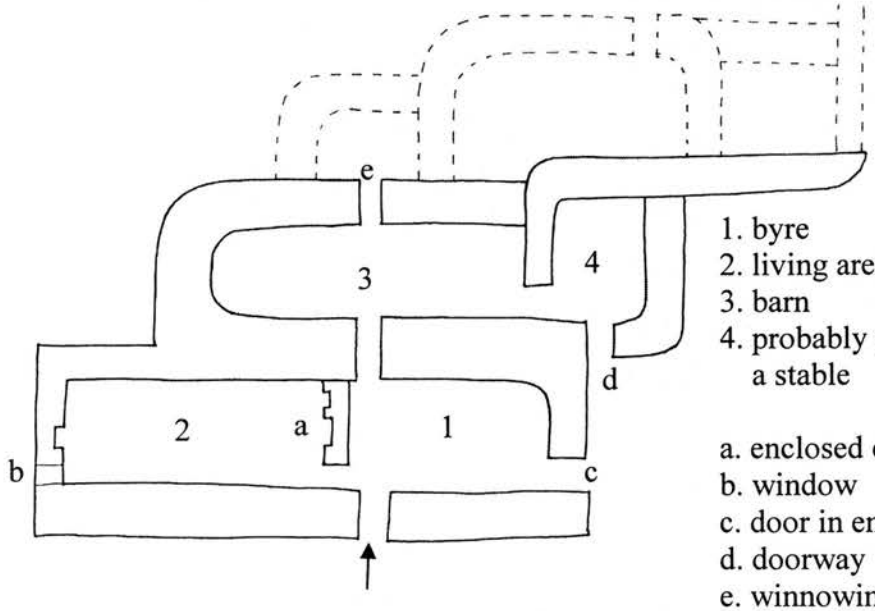
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 4**



1. byre
2. living area
3. possibly a barn
4. probably part of 3

a. wall, presumably a later addition
b. step up to living area
c. fence; lot 22 is on the other side of the fence where the remainder of this house has been torn down
d. it is unclear what happens in this area and whether this curved wall was an original feature of the building
e. doorway

House 21



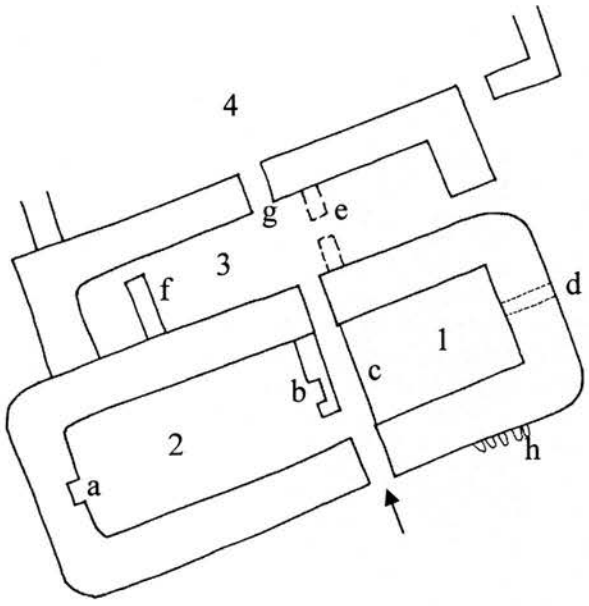
1. byre
2. living area
3. barn
4. probably part of barn, possibly a stable

a. enclosed chimney with shelf
b. window
c. door in end-wall of byre
d. doorway
e. winnowing hole

Note: Dotted lines indicate that only a vague outline of these walls can be seen on the ground. They are probably the outline of an earlier building, or of an earlier part of this house.

House 24

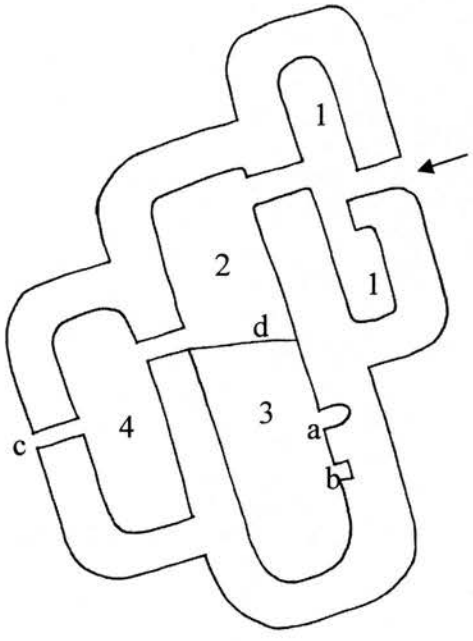
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 4**



1. byre
2. living area
3. barn
4. stack-yard

a. enclosed chimney
b. hobble wall
c. step up to living area
d. *toll-lodain*
e. possibly a wall here
f. wall
g. low doorway
h. external stair to *tobhta*

House 25

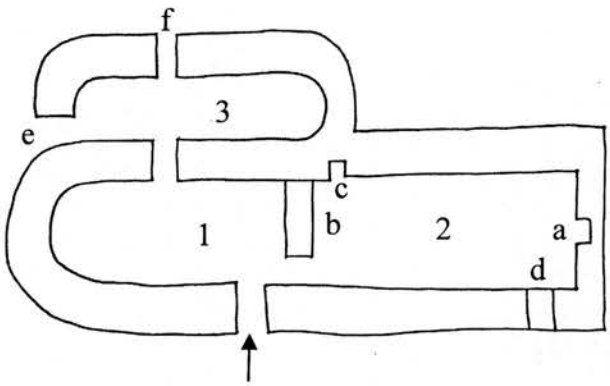


1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

a. ground level alcove
b. shelf
c. winnowing hole or low door
d. step up to living area

House 27(a)

SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 4**

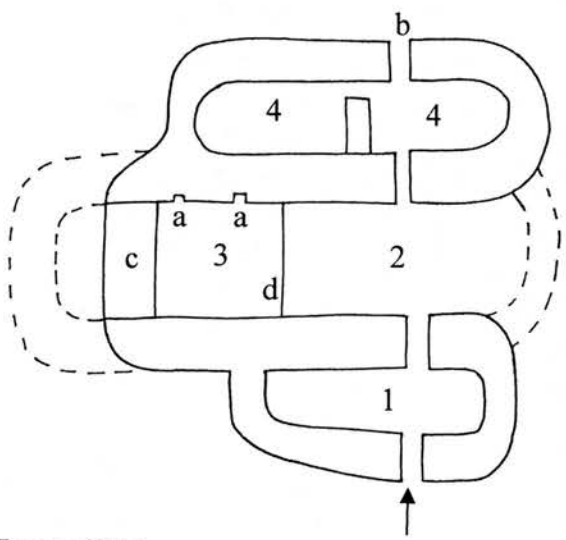


1. byre
2. living area
3. barn

a. enclosed chimney
b. hobble wall (Inf. Q), hobble cannot be seen on the ground
c. small shelf
d. window
e. door in end-wall of barn
f. winnowing hole or low door

Note: This house also had a timber partition between the byre and the hobble wall, and a timber partition between the living and the sleeping areas (Inf. Q).

House 43



1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

a. small shelf
b. low door
c. wall added to shorten the room
d. step up to living area

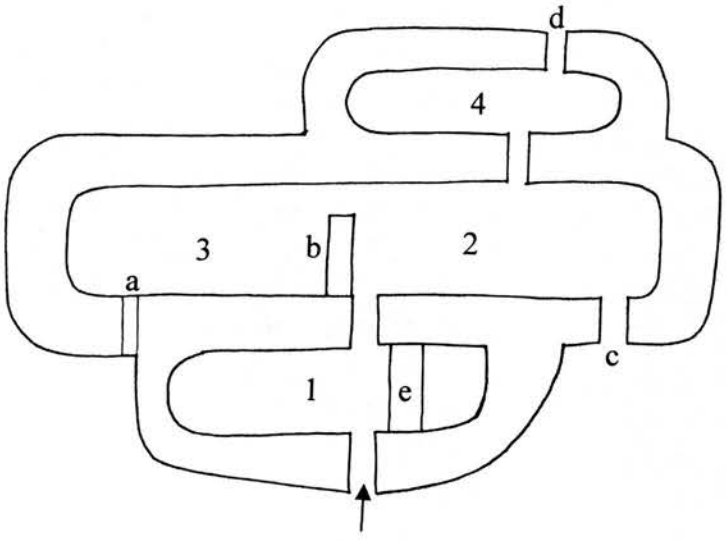
Note: Dotted line indicates that only a vague outline of these walls can be seen on the ground.

House 49(a)

SCALE 1:250

North

PHASE 4

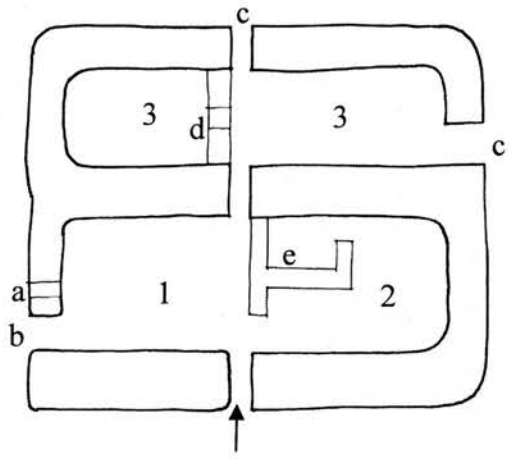


1. *fosglan*
2. byre
3. living area
4. barn

a. small square window, probably a later addition
b. partition wall, which probably contained a hobble or chimney
c. doorway in side-wall of byre
d. doorway in side-wall of barn
e. wall, later addition, probably to shorten the room

House 50

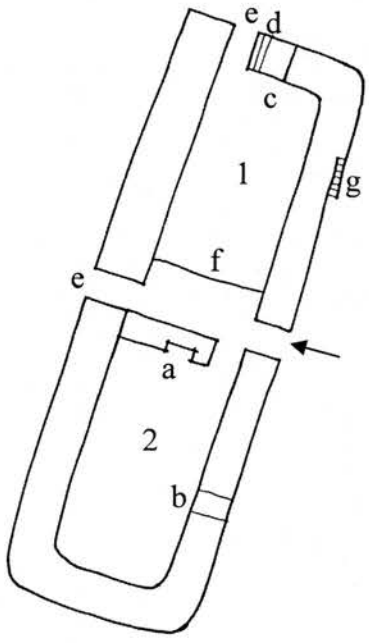
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 5**



1. byre
2. living area
3. barn

a. *toll-lodain*
b. doorway in end-wall of byre
c. doorway in barn
d. position of doorway in this partition wall is unclear
e. walls in this area are later additions

House 6(a)



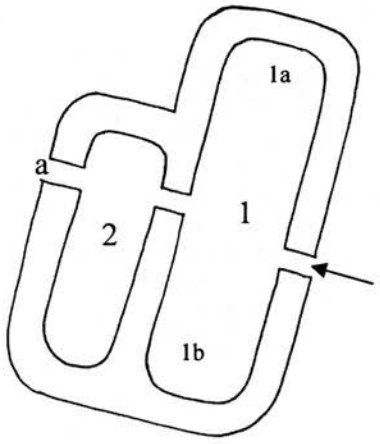
1. byre
2. living area

a. enclosed chimney
b. window
c. *toll-each*
d. *toll-lodain*
e. doorway in end-wall of byre
f. step up to living area
g. external stair

Note: There was a small one-roomed building about ten metres to the south-east of this house which may have been the barn.

House 15(b)

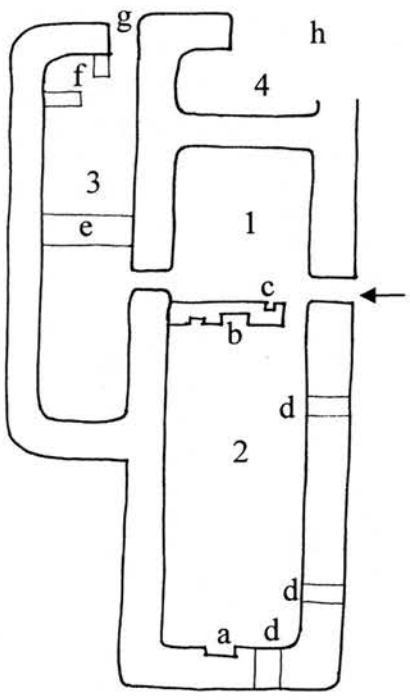
SCALE 1:250 North **PHASE 5**



1. byre-dwelling
1a. byre-end
1b. living-end
2. barn

a. low doorway or winnowing hole; exact position is difficult to determine due to fallen rubble

House 15(c)



1. byre
2. living area
3. barn
4. this area may originally have been part of the byre

a. enclosed chimney
b. hobble wall with two shelves, one above the other
c. shelf in back of hobble wall
d. window
e. wall, probably a later addition
f. small area enclosed by low walls
g. door in end-wall of barn
h. area obscured by vegetation

Note: This house was built around 1913 and was lived in until 1962 (Inf. D). There were originally ten people living in the house, two parents and eight children (Inf. D).

House 26(a)

List of Informants

A Iain M. MacLeod, 47 South Bragar
B Informant wished to remain anonymous
C Informant wished to remain anonymous
D Informant wished to remain anonymous
E Aonghas Greum, 19 South Bragar
F Duncan Smith, 32 South Bragar
G Informant wished to remain anonymous
H Angus MacLeod, Park-house, Marybank (from Calbost, Lochs)
I Chirsty Ann MacLean, 62 South Bragar
J Donald Mackay, 2 North Bragar
K Mór NicLeòid, 8 Brù
L Seòras MacLeòid, Dàil Mòr
M Cathie MacLennan, address withheld
N Mary MacLean, address withheld
O Informant wished to remain anonymous
P Informant wished to remain anonymous
Q Informant wished to remain anonymous

The following people were also extremely helpful to me in my inquiries:

Carstiana MacLean, 4 South Bragar
Dòmhnall Iain MacIver, 26 South Bragar
Donald J. MacLeod, Aberdeen
Murdo MacLeod, 10 South Bragar
Norman MacKillop, Berneray
Seonaid Greum, 19 South Bragar (from Balallan, Lochs)

Maps

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OS (1897) 1:2,500, resurveyed 1895, Ross and Cromarty, Sheet 8.

OS (1898) 1:10,560, resurveyed 1895, Ross and Cromarty, Sheet 8.

OS (1965) 1:10,560, surveyed 1849-52, revised 1956-57, Ross and Cromarty, Sheet 8.

OS (1972) 1:2,500, levelled 1955, surveyed 1971, boundaries 1972. Grid square references: NB24NE2649, 2749, 2849, 2949, 2648, 2748, 2848, 2948, 2747, 2837, 2947.

OS (1974) 1:10,000, levelled 1955, surveyed 1971, boundaries 1972. Grid references as above.

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